JOHN L. FLYNN

# JUSTIFICATION:

## A COMPARISON OF THE DOCTRINE OF REINHOLD NIEBUHR WITH THE DOCTRINE OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Theology
of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Theology

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JOHN L. FLYNN

# JUSTIFICATION

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# INTRODUCTION

Pope John XXIII once called upon the priests of America urging them to seek to understand "The Protestant mind". A short while later the same Pope announced his intention of convoking a general council. For the first time in history Protestant observers of all denominations were invited to attend. The words and actions of the Holy Father have helped create a definite change within American Catholicism: The American Catholic has realized the importance of entering into dialogue with his fellow Christians.

American Catholic-Protestant relations now seem to be moving toward an unexpected era of mutual respect, interest and cooperation. It was not always thus. Nor does it seem realistic to say that the present "era of good feeling" will perdure, unless the dialogue continues. The educated intelligent Catholic and Protestant must seek to acknowledge and discard the many erroneous opinions of one another, the unexamined prejudices toward one another which both have inherited and both still maintain.

More important, Catholic and Protestant, lay and clergy, must make a courageous effort to understand one another. This is especially important for American Catholics. The ignorance of American Catholics as regards the work of Protestant theologians, what their major concerns are, what problems they are seeking to resolve, is truly incredible, and yet easy to understand.

It is easy to understand when one realizes that up until the past few years the American seminarian received no formal training in Protestant theology, apart from a few scattered references (often out of context) to Luther, Calvin or Zwingli. As if nothing had occured in Protestant theology since the death of the reformers.

The purpose of this thesis is to continue the "dialogue" which is now flourishing in America and to serve as an introduction for American Catholics to the thought of a major Protestant theologian.

We have chosen Reinhold Niebuhr who since the early thirties has been one of the most influential teachers and writers within Protestant thought. Today he ranks with Paul Tillich as one of the few Americans whose work in theology has a world-wide audience. Out of the vast number of themes that interest Niebuhr we have chosen justification. This "articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae" has always been at the center of Protestant theology. Examining the way in which Niebuhr redefines this doctrine we can arrive at some concrete appreciation of how far Protestant thinkers have moved beyond the teaching of the reformers in seeking to make Christianity relevant for modern man.

We have been drawn to Niebuhr because of the courage and fierce honesty with which he faces the problems confronting a Christian today.

The secular community has shifted its position since the days when Schleiermacher addressed himself to "Christianity's cultured despisers." Today the intellectual's position is one of massive indifference to the claims of Christianity. Niebuhr in his articles, books and sermons has sought to shatter this indifference and complacency by showing how inadequate are modern man's own theories concerning himself. This negative movement of his thought is always accompained by the positive effort to show that the biblical view of man is the only one adequate to man's true dimensions as a creature of transcendent freedom.

In presenting Niebuhr's doctrine of justification we will consider his ideas on man, sin and Christ only to the extent that they are needed to make his doctrine of justification intelligible. We will also compare his doctrine with authoritative Catholic teaching on justication as defined by the Council of Trent. As with any comparison the task is only of value if we can penetrate to the basic reasons behind the similarities and differences which the comparison reveals.

In making this effort one does encounter many obstacles. Since the time of the reformation Catholics and Protestants have been living in different theological and philosophical traditions.

It is no surprise then that Niebuhr's use of terms, his methodology, his concept of the task of theology and of the relationship of theology to philosophy will cause us difficulties.

Consider the problem of terminology. It is surely an obstacle to the reader with a traditional Christian background. For Niebuhr takes terms such as Original Sin, Original Justice, Grace, and gives them a meaning which is not that of traditional Christianity, Catholic or Protestant. When Niebuhr uses a term the reader must make a conscious effort not to give the term the meaning commonly assigned to it.

Consider Niebuhr's use of dialectic. It is not the dialectic of the scholastics who sought ever to distinguish in order to unite. Nor is Niebuhr's the massive, all consuming dialectic of Hegel in which thesis and antithesis are united in a higher synthesis in the never ending development of the Absolute. It is more akin to Kierkegaard's use of dialectic. Niebuhr insists (like Kierkegaard) that both thesis and antithesis be held together in tension and not merged in a higher synthesis. Niebuhr believes that honest attention to the facts about human nature will force one to accept statements that should logically exclude one another but which must be held together. For example, man is finite and free, limited and unlimited. Man sins inevitably and yet he is free and responsible. These statements must be held in tension if one is to be true to the facts of moral experience. So the most basic facts of human nature must be stated in the form of a paradox. Above all, the theologians who seeks to describe God's relations to man must see them as dialectical and formulate them as paradox.

Consider the sources of Niebuhr's theology. His aim is to preach and write biblical Christianity. His primary concern is to make this Christianity relevant to the concerns of modern man. Thus he seeks to create a constant dialogue between other views of man and the one which he calls the biblical Pauline one.

In speaking from the Christian side Niebuhr uses a great number of biblical texts which he submits to a very personal exegesis. This will be made evident to the reader in the course of this dissertation.

Next to the bible one will find that he is strongly influenced by St. Augustine and by Luther. We can not describe the rela-

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In speaking from the Christian side Niebuhr uses a great number of biblical texts which he submits to a very personal exegesis. This will be made evident to the reader in the course of this dissertation.

Next to the bible one will find that he is strongly influenced by St. Augustine and by Luther. We can not describe the rela-

tionship in full detail. One can say however that Augustine's doctrine of the radical freedom of the self has been a constant influence on Niebuhr. Niebuhr will also approve and use Augustine's arguments against the clams of Pelagius for the moral power of the natural man. But Niebuhr will consistently criticize Augustine's claims that the justified man can arrive at perfection in this life or can be tending perfectly toward this goal.

Luther will also be subjected to the "yes and no" of Niebuhr's dialectic. He will reject the claim of Luther that Original Sin has completely shattered the image of God in man so that the human freedom of the sinner is utterly exstinguished in relation to salvation. This is opposed to the basic insight of Niebuhr's anthropology: the radical freedom of the transcendent yet finite self. However Niebuhr will approve Luther's continual insistence that the redeemed remain sinners ever in need of God's forgiveness. Niebuhr is surely one of the most ardent defenders of "homo simul justus et peccator" in modern theology.

Among modern theologians Kierkegaard has had a special influence on Niebuhr. Niebuhr expressly pays recognition to Kierkegaard's grasp of the self in its radical freedom, his clear stressing the fact that only in relation to God does the self truly take possession of its self, his subtle analysis of the anxiety which accompanies human freedom, and his re-interpretation of the dogma of Original Sin.

Finally among contemporary theologians Niebuhr owes a considerable debt to Emil Brunner. Niebuhr has often acknowledged this dependence. The dependence is (in our opinion at least) so basic and pervasive that one could scarcely summarize it in a monograph. Niebuhr's concept of the relationship between man and God as Encounter, his understanding of Revelation, his emphasis on the contradiction within the human self, his use of dialectic and paradox, in these and in other instances one see's Brunner's influence as an ever present one.

We have already noted that Niebuhr is as well known in modern Protestant thought as he is unknown in American Catholic circles. A brief sketch of his life would thus seem to be in order. Niebuhr was the third son and fourth child of the Reverend Gustav Niebuhr. Born in the German-speaking community of Wright City, Missouri, his father's career as pastor

of the Evangelical synod, a small Lutheran denomination, led him to many small mid-western towns. Niebuhr was educated at Elmhurst College in Illinois and then at Eden Theological Seminary in Missouri. In 1915 he was awarded an M.A. degree at Yale University after two years in divinity school. In the fall of that same year he began his work at Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit. There he encountered the dehumanizing brutality of the modern industrial system and there he first encountered the problems of social justice and social order which have been a constant theme in his teaching and writing. In 1928 Niebuhr resigned his pastorate in Detroit to accept a position at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He remained in that post until his retirement in 1960 and it was during the years at Union that his most important books were conceived and written.

## Chapter One

# PRAESUPPOSITA TO NIEBUHR'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

## I. Niebuhr's Doctrine of Man

> "It is not unfair to affirm that modern culture, that is, our culture since the Renaissance, is to be credited with the greatest advances in the understanding of nature and with the greatest confusion in the understanding of man." [1]

Long before the Gifford lectures were delivered, Niebuhr was convinced that modern man's knowledge of himself is confused and distorted. Both his early years in the ministry and his classroom encounters with theology students revealed to him how inadequate is modern man's knowledge of himself. Niebuhr became convinced that a faulty concept of man is at the root of all modern errors. And this led him to the further insight that man's inadequate and erroneous knowledge of himself was due primarily to his having abandoned the only adequate source of self understanding, the bible. Thus it has been Niebuhr's constant concern in all of his teaching and writing to explode man's simple certainties about himself and to show how inadequate are modern answers to man's problems when compared with a christian anthropology based on biblical truths.

It is especially important in a study on Niebuhr's doctrine of justification to obtain a clear notion of his doctrine of man. For there is an organic relationship between his doctrine of man

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[1] HN, p. 5.

and his teaching on sin and justification.[2] It seems accurate to say that Niebuhr's concept of the transcendent self in its radical freedom is the key to an understanding of his doctrine of sin and his reinterpretation of the traditional Protestant doctrine of justification by faith.

Some feel that Niebuhr places too much stress on his doctrine of man. He has been called an anthropologian.[3] These critics are convinced that his doctrine of man plays a limiting role in his theology, that is that it has a limiting function, limiting even the activity of God. Whether this charge is true on not will become clearer in the course of this study.

We have already suggested that the bible is the primary source of Niebuhr's doctrine. But this biblical doctrine is integrated with an analysis of the human situation which owes much to St. Augustine and Kierkegaard.[4] Another way in which Niebuhr seeks to point up the relevance of a christian view of man is by eliminating other views such as naturalism and idealism. But his emphasis is on the bible for Niebuhr seeks a christian view of man, a view "which can do justice to both the height of human self transcendence and the organic unity between the spirit of man and his physical life." [5]

The all important doctrines for constructing a christian view of man are the doctrines of creation and of the imago Dei.

The doctrine of creation as found in Genesis explains man's physical self and his temporal environment. The doctrine of man as image of God reveals man's spiritual and eternal dimensions. And the two doctrines together compel one to affirm that

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[2] Wolf insists that Niebuhr's theology is most aptly termed a relational theology. Wolf also says that "it (Niebuhr's doctrine of man) defines his understanding of Christology, Atonement and Echatology." W.J. Wolf, "Reinhold Nierbuhr's Doctrine of Man," in *Reinhold Niebuhr*: *His Religious, Social and Political Thought,* Edited by C.W. Kegley and R.W. Bretall) (New York: 1956), p. 232.

[3] Gordon Harland, *The Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr,* (New York: 1960), p. 13.

[4] Richard Kroner, "The Sources of Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology," in RN, p. 183.

[5] HN, p. 132.

man is a paradox. For man is both limited and unlimited, finite and free, and the two biblical concepts express this fact of the basic paradox of human existence: "man's involvement in finiteness and his transcendence over it." [6] Shirley Guthrie, in one of the best studies of Niebuhr's thought, states this fact very clearly: "He (man) transcends nature's necessities and limitations and he is subject to them; he is free and bound, unlimited and limited. Niebuhr never tires of reiterating this paradox. It is the beginning point of every doctrine he considers." [7] His self-transcendence makes man the imago Dei[8] As imago Dei man has no limits short of the eternal yet he remains a creature even in the highest reaches of his self consciousness. He remains a finite self.[9]

Both doctrine are needed to explain man's individuality but the all important factor is man's self-transcendence. For the transcendent self involves a. self knowledge and is the source of discreteness, b. freedom and is thus the source of man's uniqueness.[10] Thus man as imago Dei is not only self conscious but self determining.

The transcendent self is the real center of the human person. It has various levels of self transcendence. It is capable of transcending the processes of nature. It can further transcend the processes of reason and it is finally capable of even transcending itself: "... the pure or transcendent ego which stands above consciousness as the consciousness of consciousness and which

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[6] HN, pp. 187-188.

[7] Shirley C. Guthrie, *The Theological Character of Reinhold Niebuhr's Social Ethic,* (Winterthur, 1959) p. 97.

[8] "The Christian view of man... emphasizes the height of self-transcendence in man's spiritual stature in its doctrine of "image of God." HN, p. 161.

[9] "In its purest form the Christian view of man regards man as a unity of God-likeness and creaturliness in which the remains a creature even in the highest spiritual dimensions of his existence and may reveal elements of the image of God even in the lowliest aspects of his natural life." *Ibid.* p. 161.

[10] "Self knowledge is thus the basis of discrete individuality"... "Human capacity for self-transcendence is also the basis of human freedom and thereby of the uniqueness of the individual." *Ibid.* p. 58.

expresses itself in terms of memory and foresight, ... is the real center of human personality" [11]

It is important to note that this transcendent self is also a power over and above reason and that it is more important than reason which is derived from it. This was one of St. Augustine's important insights into human nature. He saw clearly that the self "is something more than mind and is able to use the mind for its purposes." [12]

Among the moderns, Heidegger and Scheler seek to express this same idea that man is more than a rational creature.[13] The transcendent self can in memory detach itself from its environement and contemplate the drama of the ages. In imagination it can question the validity of its own rational processes and by conscience it can pass moral judgement on its own activities.[14] Yet the self remains one in its various operations. And in all its transcendent operations the self is radically free. It is free not only as to means; man is not only free "to choose between various alternatives presented to him by the processes of nature, but also in the sense that he transcends himself in such a way that he must choose his total end." [15]

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[11] HN, p. 76.

[12] CRPP, p. 116.

[13] Niebuhr quotes Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit,* p. 49: "The idea of 'transcendence', namely that man is something which reaches beyond itself — that he is more than a rational creature." Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit,* p. 49, quoted by Niebuhr in HN, p. 173, 183 "It is the quality of the human spirit on the other hand to lift itself above itself as living organism and to make the whole temporal and spatial world, including itself, the object of its knowledge." Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos,* pp. 46-47 quoted by Niebuhr in HN, p. 174.

[14] FH, p. 13. Memory is an important aspect of the image of God in man. First appreciated by Augustine it "represents man's capacity to rise above even while he is within the temporal flux." Man's memory gives rise to history and helps him avoid the notion that events are purely the result of natural necessity. The self ... "uses memory ... to transcend its movement through time ..." SDH, p. 4; *ibid.,* p. 15; "The self's capacity to view itself, and to judge either its short-range or its long-range purposes, gives rise to a reality in its life which is usually termed "conscience." SDH, p. 13.

[15] HN, p. 174.

Man sees in himself endless potentialities. There is no limit short of ultimate reality as to what he ought to be. Yet this same man is a creature with bonds sharply limned by creation. Man is not only the imago Dei. He is a creature and the two doctrines must always be placed together. As creature man is finite even in the highest reaches of his self consciousness and yet he is not evil because he is finite. The book of Genesis states this clearly: "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." (Gen. 1,31) Not only does Genesis teach this, indeed the entire "Biblical interpretation of life and history rests upon the assumption that the created world, the world of finite, dependent and contingent existence, is not evil by reason of its finiteness." [16] In actual fact man's finiteness, his dependence and insufficiency "are facts which belong to God's plan of creation and must be accepted with reverence and humility." [17]

The bible also clearly insists that man as God's creation is one. The biblical doctrine permits no dualism. The biblical view of man presents man as a "created and finite existence in both body and spirit." [18]

This then is the basic paradox of human existence: "man's involvement in finiteness and his transcendence over it." [19] In seeking to understand himself as finite and free man must confess that he is a paradox. And Niebuhr does not hesitate to quote with approval Albert Ritschl's words: "In every religion, what is sought with the help of the superhuman power reverenced by man is a solution of the contradiction in which man finds himself as both a part of nature and a spiritual personality claiming to dominate nature." [20]

This contradiction in man's nature becomes most evident when man acts. For in action the banner of contradiction is unfurled. In action man displays the contradiction which is true of his nature. For in acting man denies either his finiteness or

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[16] HN, pp. 178-9.

[17] HN, p. 179.

[18] HN, p. 13.

[19] HN, pp. 187-188.

[20] Albert Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, p. 199 as quoted by Niebuhr, HN, p. 190.

his freedom. Thus the paradox is heightened. This will be clearly seen when we analyze Niebuhr's doctrine of sin.

Ultimately the transcendent self can find its true home only in God. Indeed this essential homelessness of the self is the ground of all religion. Augustine best expresses this fact. He had an understanding, says Niebuhr, of the fact that "... the human spirit in its depth and height reaches into eternity ..." [21]

How is God manifested to man? Only by Revelation.[22] Niebuhr holds no brief for a posteriori demonstrations of God's existence. God reveals himself to man and this revelation takes different forms though it is true of every form of revelation that "the transcendence of God over, and his intimate relation to, the world are equally emphasized." [23]

Revelation may be either general or historical. General (or private) revelation "is the testimony in the consciousness of every person that his life touches a reality beyond himself, a reality deeper and higher than the system of nature in which he stands." [24] This experience of God is one of unqualified dependence. But it has another aspect: "the sense of being seen, commanded, judged and known from beyond ourselves" [25] And thirdly, the most problematic element of general revelation is "the longing for forgiveness." [26]

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[21] HN, p. 168. Throughout his writings Niebuhr praises St. Augustine for *a*) his biblical rather than rationalistic concept of human selfhood. For Augustine the self is an integral unit of mind and body. *b*) yet it is something more than mind and is able to use the mind for its own purposes. *c*) it has a mysterious identity and integrity transcending its functions of mind, memory and will. (Cf.) CRPP, p. 116.

[22] Niebuhr does not stress the absolute transcendence of God as "wholly other" but he completely rules out any a posteriori demonstration of God's existence. He accepts Kant's view that the cosmological argument is invalid. The effort to argue from the dependent and contingent character of all finite being to the reality of God has not probative but only confirmatory value. ..."The creation is contemplated as pointing to a Creator, already known in man's moral experience." HN, p. 143.

[23] HN, p. 135.

[24] HN, p. 136.

[25] HN, p. 137.

[26] HN, p. 141.

These three elements of general revelation are specified and clarified by other forms of revelation.[27] The doctrine of creation shows that the same "Thou" who confronts us in our personal experience is also the source and creator of the whole world. The second element of personal religion, the experience of being judged, is specified by the whole biblical concept of God as judge of sinful men.[28] And the third element, the longing for forgiveness, is completed by the revelation of God's character in the life and death of Christ.[29] So the concepts of God as Creator, Judge and Redeemer clarify and specify corresponding elements in man's personal religious experience[30] while man's personal experience in turn makes these revelatory truths credible and more important relevant and meaningful for man's situation.[31] Thus the two aspects are related dialectically.

## II. Doctrine of Sin

Nearly all who are familiar with Niebuhr's thought agree that his subtle analysis of sin is his most important contribution to theology. Two recent studies of Niebuhr's thought have sought to interpret his whole theology in the light of this doctrine.[32] Gordon Harland, who feels that the importance of sin in Niebuhr's teaching has been exaggerated, still can write: "Nie-

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[27] HN, p. 141. Here is a definite ambibuity in Niebuhr's thought. Creation as contained in Genesis is not a doctrine of revelation. Yet it is apprehended in and only by faith and leads to the assertion that God creates ex nihilo. Niebuhr gives no explanation for his excluding creation from the category of biblical or historical revelation nor does he suggest in what category it belongs.

[28] HN, p. 141.

[29] HN, p. 142 ff.

[30] HN, p. 152 ff.

[31] HN, p. 139.

[32] Hans Hofmann writes "Sin is the fundamental principle on which his interpretations are based." *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr,* translated by Louise Smith, (New York: 1956). Please see also M.F. Thelen, *Man as Sinner in Contemporary American Theology,* (New York: 1946).

buhr's rich and profound analysis of man's sin is quite generally regarded as his most valuable contribution to contemporary theology." [33]

Certainly it is not our purpose to weigh the importance of Niebuhr's doctrine of sin in relation to the rest of his theology. It is readily understandable that faced with a liberal Christianity seeking to minimize or deny the reality of sin, Niebuhr felt compelled to place special emphasis on the doctrine of sin in order to impress the reality of sin on his hearers and readers. We are anxious rather to learn from Niebuhr what the basic meaning of sin is. What are Original and actual sin? Are they analogous concepts? And above all, how is sin related to the doctrine of justification?

One difficulty for the Catholic studient is that Niebuhr places little value on the traditional distinction between original and actual sin although he retains the terminology. He completely rejects the distinction between mortal and venial sin.[34] As we consider the essential points of Niebuhr's doctrine of sin it will become evident that sin is for him a *univocal* concept.

Man is a sinner. Classical philosophy may have concerned itself with man's finiteness and the tension between man as finite and man as free. In biblical Christianity man seeks redemption from sin.[35]

Man's position as standing in yet above nature is the occasion of his sin. Yet the contradiction in which man stands is not the cause of man's sin because according to biblical doctrine there is no strict or absolute necessity that sin follow from man's position. Still man's ambigous position is the occasion of his sin. "Man is insecure and involved in natural contingency; he seeks to overcome his insecurity by a will to power which over reaches the limits of human creaturliness. Man is ignorant and involved in the limits of a finite mind; but he pretends that he is not limited. He assumes that he can gradually transcend finite limitations until his mind becomes identical with universal

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[33] Gordon Harland, *op. cit.*, introduction p. ix, p. 76.

[34] "... all men are equally sinners in the sight of God." HN, p. 233.

[35] HN, p. 190.

mind.[36] Man's frantic efforts to escape his situation involve him in sin.

The bible defines man's consequent sin in both religious and moral terms. In terms of religion sin indicates "man's rebellion against God, his effort to usurp the place of God." [37] In its moral and social aspects sin always involves injustice. "The ego which falsely makes itself the centre of existence in its pride and will to power inevitably subordinates other life to its will and thus does injustice to other life." [38] Sin can finally be considered as sensuality. Sensuality involves man's abortive attempt to end the tension between his finiteness and freedom by loosing himself "in some aspect of the world's vitalities." [39] So sin involves man's denying either his freedom or his finiteness.

Niebuhr is especially interested in analyzing the psychological state that precedes sin. For this he is greatly indebted to Kierkegaard.[40] We have noted man's situation as standing in and yet above the contingent, finite world. Man's situation tempts him. For man who is at once finite and free, at once limited and unlimited, becomes anxious. Anxiety is the inevitable concomitant of the paradox of freedom and finiteness in which man is found. "Anxiety is the internal precondition of sin." It is not identified with sin but precedes it.[41] It does not of necessity lead to sin. For ideally faith in God should overcome all insecurity and anxiety. Man should cling to God in trusting faith. For this reason Christianity has always seen the most basic sin as one of unbelief.[42] It precedes even the sin of pride. Nor can

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[36] HD, pp. 190-191.

[37] HD, p. 191, FH, p. 121.

[38] HD, p. 191.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 191.

[40] In HN, p. 195, footnote 1, he acknowledges this: "Kierkegaard says: "Anxiety is the psychological condition which precedes sin. It so near, so fearfully near to sin, and yet it is not the explanation for sin." *Der Begriff der Angst*, p. 89. Kierkegaard's analysis of the relation of anxiety to sin is the profoundest in Christian thought."

[41] HN, pp. 194-195.

[42] Niebuhr quotes with approval Luther's statement "The beginning of sin is to depart from God and not to trust him." *Treatise on Christian Liberty*, in HN, p. 195.

anxiety be identified with sin. Because it is not only a precondition for sin and evil but also for creative endeavour. Man . . . "is also anxious because he does not know the limits of his possibilities. He can do nothing and regard it perfectly done, because higher possibilities are revealed in each achievement." [43] And the two elements may be closely intermingled in the one action. Since it is not possible to make a simple separation between the creative and destructive elements in anxiety, one can not purge moral achievements of sin as easily as the moralists imagine.[44]

All men are sinners in the sight of God and from the ultimate viewpoint of divine justice all are equally sinners. *The Pauline assertion* "for there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3,22-33) is an indispensable expression of the Christian understanding of sin.[45] Yet there must be some distinction made between the "oppressor and his victim; between the congenital liar and the moderately truthful man." [46] Niebuhr resolves this problem by distinguishing between the equality of sin and the inequality of guilt. While all men are equally sinners, there is an ascertainable inequality of guilt among men in the actualities of history. Guilt has a special meaning for Niebuhr. It signifies "the objective and historical consequence of sin, for which the sinner must be held responsible." [47] It means then, the broken homes, the oppressive poverty, all the consequences that follow sin.

We mentioned earlier that by trust in God man should be able to transcend the destructive, sinful elements in anxiety. It is important to stress the fact that such trust in only an ideal possibility. In man's *historical existence* it is *never realized.* In actual fact, in every action man's unbelief or pride betray him into sinful actions, actions that are inevitably sinful and

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[43] HN, pp. 195-196.

[44] HN, pp. 196-7. Niebuhr gives examples of how the two forms of anxiety are compounded in parents' anxious concern for the future of their children or in a statesman's sollicitude for his nation.

[45] HN, p. 233.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 233.

[47] HN, p. 235.

yet man is responsible since these actions take place in man's freedom.[48]

## III. Reconstruction of the Doctrine of Original Sin

Niebuhr seeks to avoid the literalistic illusions in the doctrine of Original Sin and to present its enduring truth. For the doctrine of Original Sin is a mythical doctrine which contains a permanent valid insight.[49] When taken as literal history the account of man's fall as found in Genesis can only produce illusions. Niebuhr does not hesitate to strip the doctrine of all illusions. The story of Genesis is not concerned with an historical state. It is neither an account of the origin of the human race nor an account of the origin of evil in the world. Rather it is a description of the quality of human existence. Nor does the account in Genesis teach an inherited taint. Adam does not transmit to his progeny a sinful nature. Adam is merely a symbol, manifesting what is true of all men: that all men are egotists in contradiction to their essential nature." [50] So the enduring meaning of the fall of Adam is that it portrays the existential condition of every man. "Adam and, together with him, all men seek to overstep the bounds which are set by the Creator for man as creature." [51]

Original Sin is then for Niebuhr a defect of the will, or a bias toward sin which is the presupposition of every actual sin. It is not an act at all but the presupposition of every act.[52] And

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[48] See following section.

[49] In the same manner a symbolic historical event, such as the "Fall" of man, loses its real meaning when taken as literal history. It symbolizes an inevitable and yet not a natural corruption of human freedom. It must not, therefore be regarded either as a specific event with which evil begins in history... FH, p. 33. "The universal inclination of the self to be more concerned with itself than to be embarrassed by its undue claims may be defined as 'original sin.' The universality of the inclination is something of a mystery. The orthodox idea of an inherited sinful taint certainly can not explain this tendency." SDH, p. 18.

[50] FH, pp. 121-122.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 121.

[52] The various commentators on Niebuhr's thought are all in agreement here, e.g. M. Thelen, *Man as Sinner*, p. 95: Original Sin is "a defect of the

the mystery of Original Sin lies in the fact that while it is a corruption which has a universal dominion over all men, it is not by nature but in freedom that men sin.[53]

In retaining the term Original Sin Niebuhr's basic concern is how to maintain man's constant and inevitable sinfulness together with his freedom and responsibility.[54] Here again one encounters a paradox. The paradox of sin is that man sins by a fateful necessity and yet he is responsible for his actions. Niebuhr frankly admits that this is logical nonsense.[55] And yet St. Paul, St. Augustine and Calvin all maintain the doctrine in its logical absurdity.[56] Indeed, "One could multiply examples in

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will or bias in the will, which characterizes the will before any act, and whose existence is inferred from the universality of sin." Book review of HN in *Theological Studies*, F. Ryan, p. 81 "Original Sin is regarded not as a fact which took place in history but as the root from which stems the process of every actual sin." C. Weigel, *Faith and Understanding in America*, New York, 1959, p. 100: "man in all his actions obeys drives of selfishness manifested by pride and sensuality. Man can not elude this inescapable condition. This is the true original sin."

[53] . . . "It symbolizes an inevitable and yet not a natural corruption of human freedom." FH, p. 32.

[54] Shirley C. Guthrie, *The Theological Character of Reinhold Niebuhr's Social Ethic*, (Winterthur: 1959) p. 99. "Niebuhr introduces the concept of 'Original Sin' or 'a bias toward evil' in man, to show on the one hand that all men are sinful (sin is inevitable) and yet on the other hand that sin does not belong to man's essential nature." (Sin is not necessary: man is responsible for it.)

[55] Paul Tillich, in an article entitled "Sin and Grace" in *Reinhold Niebuhr, a Prophetic Voice in Our Times* ed. by Harold R. Landon, Greenwich, Conn. 1962. Tillich relates the following conversation with Niebuhr: "Often I have bothered him with this word, '*Sin is not necessary but inevitable*'. Now this is logical nonsense, and this is just what he told me. 'But, he said, 'this logical nonsense we have to take.' " In the same article Tillich relates that Niebuhr now feels that the term Original Sin should not be used at all. In its place he suggests universal estrangement. *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

[56] According to Niebuhr St. Paul, Augustine and Calvin all maintain that Original Sin is inevitable and thus universal and yet man is free and responsible. *a*) St. Paul insists man is responsible for original sin "So that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God." (Romans I, 20-21). Yet Paul sees Original Sin as an inevitable defect. "Wherefore, as, by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Romans V, 12). *b*) St. Augustine includes the facts of

the thought of theologians of the Pauline tradition in which logical consistency is sacrificed in order to maintain on the one hand that the will is free in the sense that man is responsible for his sin, and on the other hand is not free in the sense that he can, of his own will, do nothing but evil." [57]

Niebuhr is convinced that all Christian thinkers before Augustine destroyed the paradox of inevitability and responsibility and thus can be considered Pelagian.[58] For Niebuhr the essential note of Pelagianism is "its insistence that actual sins can not be regarded as sinful or as involving guilt if they do not proceed from a will which is essentially free." [59] These writers place the bias toward evil not in a will enslaved to sin but in an inertia of nature. So concerned are they to preserve man's free will intact that for them Original Sin is not sin at all. On the other hand these same theologians so emphasize the freedom of individual acts as to make every sinful act appear "as a conscious choice of evil in defiance of a known good." [60]

Official Catholic doctrine which Niebuhr would call Semi-Pelagian, differs very little from the position of Pelagianism. As stated by Thomas Aquinas it defines Original Sin negatively as a privation of something which does not belong to man essentially and thus can not be regarded as a corruption of man's

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inevitability and responsibility in one statement when he writes: "Man's nature was indeed at first created faultless and without sin; but nature as man now has it, into which everyone is born from Adam, wants the Physician, being no longer in a healthy state. All good qualities which it still possesses ... it has from the most High God, its Creator and Maker. But the flaw which darkens and weakens all these natural goods it has not contracted from its blameless Creator ... but from that Original Sin which it committed of its own free will." ("Treatise on Nature and Grace," ch. 3, *Anti-Pelagian Works,* Vol. I, p. 238. *c*) Calvin seems to teach this same doctrine: The universality and inevitability of Original Sin: "it prevails over all by hereditary right." Yet it is not outside the realm of responsibility: "... it is rather an adventious quality or accident, than a substantial quality originally innate." *Institutes,* Book II ,Ch. I, par. II.

[57] HN, p. 259.

[58] HN, p. 260.

[59] The writers whom Niebuhr considers Pelagian are "all Christian thinkers before Augustine"... HN, p. 260.

[60] *Ibid.,* p. 262.

essential nature.[61] By avoiding the notion of total depravity man remains responsible and his freedom is maintained. The logical inconsistency of Augustine's doctrine is avoided. But is either the Pelagian or Semi-pelagian doctrine true to the observable facts of human wrong-doing? [62]

Niebuhr believes that all writers outside the Pauline tradition have exaggerated man's freedom in regard to actual sin, making each actual sin an act of conscious perversity, that is an act of fully conscious defiance of God's will. And at the same time they have taken away man's freedom in regard to Original Sin or the bias for sin, placing this bias toward sin not in man's will but in the inertia of nature. Niebuhr holds just the opposite to be true. Man has less freedom in his actual sin, more freedom in his bias toward sin than these writers realize.[64] And man's ultimate freedom is contained in his realization that he is not free, that he sins inevitably.[65]

## IV. Reconstruction of the Doctrine of Original Justice

Unlike Catholic or traditional Protestant theology, Niebuhr considers the doctrine of Original Justice after treating of Original Sin. Why he does this becomes clear as one considers the novel meaning he gives to the term Original Justice. Again he affirms what he said of the Fall. The state of Original Justice is not

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[61] "The privation of original justice, whereby the will is made subject to God, is the formal element in Original Sin, while every other disorder of the soul's powers is a kind of material element in respect to original sin... I-II, q. 83, a. 1 quoted in HN, p. 263.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 263.

[63] HN, p. 260.

[64] "The actual sin follows more inevitably from the bias towards sin than is usually assumed. On the other hand the bias toward sin is something more than a mere lag of nature or physical impulse or historical circumstance. There is, in other words, less freedom in the actual sin and more responsibility for the bias toward sin (Original Sin) than moralistic interpretations can understand." HN, p. 266.

[65] "The final paradox is that the discovery of the inevitability of sin is man's highest assertion of freedom." *Ibid.*, p. 279.

an historical state.[66] And the Catholic concept of Original Justice as the state in which Adam was created, comprising an ensemble of gratuitous gift, both praeternatural and supernatural, bears little resemblence except the name to Niebuhr's concept of Original Justice.

For Niebuhr the problem of Original Justice is one of describing the proper relationship between man's essential nature and his present sinful state. Led by their false concept of Original Justice as an historical state, both Protestants and Catholics fell into error. "In Protestant thought it aggravated the tendency toward extravagant statements of man's depravity, ..." [67] "In Catholic thought, chronological litteralism encouraged the definition of the state of original righteousness, as a special supernatural gift, a *donum supernaturale* which was added to the *pura* naturalia, that is to the essential humanity which Adam had as man." [68] Neither side maintains the paradox "that sin is a corruption of man's true essence but not its destruction." [69] The effort of Niebuhr's thought is to maintain a balance between a Catholic doctrine that sees no corruption in man's essential nature and a protestant doctrine for which the image of God in man is totally destroyed.

To clarify Niebuhr's concept of Justitia Originalis we must begin by considering the meaning of the essential nature of man and the virtue or perfection corresponding to that nature.[70] There are two elements making up the essential nature of man.[71] We have already encountered both of them. Man as creature, man as Imago Dei. The first element of man's essential nature is his character as a creature belonging to the order of nature;

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[66] ..."Christian theology has found it difficult to refute the rationalistic rejection of the myth of the Fall without falling into the literalistic error of insisting upon the Fall as an historical event. [And it has made] ... the assumption that the perfection from which man fell is to be assigned to a particular historical period, i.e. the paradisiacal period before the Fall." HN, pp. 283-284.

[67] HN, p. 284.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 285.

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 285.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 285.

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 286.

this includes his natural endowments and determinations, his physical and social impulses, his sexual and racial differentations.[72]

The original perfection which corresponds to this first aspect of man's nature is usually called natural law. "It is the law which defines the proper performance of his functions, the normal harmony of his impulses and the normal social relations between himself and his fellows within the limitations of the natural order ... [this law] ... distinguishes the obvious requirements of his nature as creature in the natural order from the special requirements of his nature as free spirit." [73]

The second element in the essential nature of man is his freedom of spirit, "his transcendence over natural process and finally his self-transcendence." [74] The corresponding elements in man's original perfection are analogous to the Catholic virtues of faith, hope and charity. These are not supernatural gratuitous gifts of God but basic requirements of man in his freedom.[75] Faith in the providence of God is a necessary requirement of man's freedom because lacking faith "the anxiety of freedom tempts man to seek a self-sufficiency and selfmastery incompatible with his dependence upon forces which he does not control.[76] Hope is a particular form of faith. It enables man to commit himself entirely to the providence of God.[77] Love is a further requirement of man's freedom and is in a way derived from faith. Man's social nature impels him to live in community. Yet in his transcendent freedom man places himself above the "cohesions of nature and the uniformities of mind which bind life to life. ... Since men are separated from one another by the uniqueness and individuality of each spirit, however closely they may be bound together by ties of nature, they can not

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[72] HN., p. 286.

[73] HN, p. 287.

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 287.

[75] "The virtues which correspond to the second element in his nature, that is, to the freedom of his spirit, are analogous to the 'theological virtues' of Catholic thought, namely faith, hope and love. ... (they are) ... basic requirements of freedom." HN, p. 287.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 287.

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 287.

relate themselves to one another in terms which will do justice to both the bonds of nature and the freedom of their spirit if they are not related in terms of love." [78] In love the other is no longer an object but a subject related to the self as I and Thou.

We clearly see now the unique sense that Niebuhr gives to the "theological virtues." They are not counsels of perfection nor virtues that would simply complete or perfect an otherwise incomplete or imperfect natural goodness. Man's freedom demands them. Without these virtues his freedom becomes a source of sinful infection. Although sinful man lacks them and is incapable of achieving them they remain basic requirements of man's freedom.[79]

What then is the relationship between man's essential nature and his present sinful state? Or to phrase it more precisely, what are the effects of the Fall on human nature? As in many other instances Niebuhr's own thought is best revealed in his criticism of other positions. Catholicism was wrong in asserting that the Fall only destroyed a donum supernaturale without altering man's essential nature. It appears that Catholicism saw an alteration in only the virtue and not the structure of man.[80] But it so defined man's virtue as to contain a part of man's structure, his transcendent freedom. Protestantism is wrong in maintaining that man's sin destroys the image of God, i.e. the essential nature of man.[81] Against Protestant thought it is necessary to maintain that despite sin, the image of God in man remains. Against Catholicism one must "eliminate the unwarranted distinction between a completely lost original justice and a uncorrupted natural justice. What is called original justice in Catholic thought really represents the requirement of human freedom in its most ultimate sense. Natural justice represents the requirents of man as creature. Both are corrupted by sin: but both are still with man, not indeed as realizations but requirements." [82]

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[78] HN, p. 288.

[79] "But they are basic and not supplementary requirements of his freedom." HN, p. 289.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 292.

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 292.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 292.

It is not possible to find in reason or in any other human faculty a place where the disease of sin has not penetrated.[83] Yet man does have an awareness and memory of an original perfection. It is in his self-transcendence that man is aware of the conflict between what he is and what he ought to be.[84] In his transcendence man is aware of his original perfection as requirement or claim on his sinful self. To be more precise "perfection before the fall is perfection before the act." [85] The only genuine meaning of the myth of the Fall touches on this point. "Adam was sinless before he acted and sinful in his first recorded act." [86] This is true of every human being and every human action.

What Niebuhr means is this: every human being in the anxiety that is consequent upon freedom commits sin in its various actions by seeking to make himself the false center of meaning, by raising its own relative, contingent values to the level of the absolute and necessary. But the self from time to time, in moments of transcendence, realizes the contradiction between its present sinful state and the state of peace and harmony which should govern its relations to itself, God and the neighbour. Man's awareness of the tensions between what he is and what he ought to be, this is the locus of Justitia Originalis. It consists in the memory and knowledge of what he ought to be, the law of man's freedom which is the law of love.[87]

## V. Christology

Man's paradoxical situation as standing in and yet transcending in his freedom the finite, contingent world, inevitably leads him into sin. Yet man preserves the memory of an original perfection. The encounter with Christ both heightens man's

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[83] *Ibid.*, p. 293.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 294.

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 294.

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 294. When Niebuhr speaks of action he means not only transitive but immanent activies of the self.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. 294.

knowledge of the seriousness of sin and gives precise, tragic content to man's realization that he is not what he ought to be. For Christ, the Son of God, suffering on the cross reveals with maximum impact the meaning of sin. And Christ as second Adam, as perfect man manifests what man ought to be.[88]

Niebuhr's doctrine of Christ seeks to move between liberal and orthodox teaching to a more biblical Christology.[89] Both liberals and orthodox (Protestant and Catholic) obscure the truth and power of the Christian faith. Liberal theologians reduce too sharply the dimensions of Christ. They speak of a good man whose good teaching and good example we ought to follow. Such a Christ is "... the bearer of no more than a pale truism." [90] And Liberals can not explain why Christ rather than Socrates or perhaps some man in the future is the final revelation of God. The orthodox seek to perform the impossible task of rationally explicating the mystery of Christ. They fail to see that this mystery is presented in the symbolic dramatic, historical statements of the bible and can not become part of a philosophical system.[91]

Niebuhr's primary interest is not with the resurrection nor with the incarnation. He concerns himself almost exclusively with the Atonement, the cross of Christ.[92] On the cross Christ is the final revelation concerning the nature of God and also concerning the nature of man. What one sees clearly displayed

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[88] "The suffering of God is on the one hand the inevitable consequence of sin's rebellion against goodness." HD, pp. 57-58. "Christ as the norm of human nature defines the final perfection of man in history." *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[89] This is clear from his rejection of both liberal and orthodox teaching regarding Christ. Cf. HD, pp. 55-56, pp. 62-63; FH, p. 167; SDH, p. 96.

[90] BT, p. 11.

[91] "This dogma did indeed avail itself of Greek speculative categories, but not with great success. For how could this man be declared to be at once God and man when it was the nature of God to be 'impassible', and nothing in history can be 'impassible' Obviously the difficulty was in transposing symbolic, dramatic statements into ontological ones." SDH, p. 109.

[92] Shirley Guthrie, among others, refers to this almost exclusive interest of Niebuhr in the doctrine of the *Atonement* to the neglect of the Incarnation. *The Theological Character of Reinhold Niebuhr's Social Ethic*, p. 121.

while contemplating the cross of Christ is the Wisdom and the Power of God.[93] The Prophets of Israel, holding with firm faith that God was both just and merciful, were ever perplexed by the question: how are God's justice and mercy reconciled? The cross of Christ reveals the answer and is thus a true insight into God's Wisdom. God as revealed in Christ has resources of mercy beyond the law and judgement which his justice demands but God can make these resources of mercy effective only as he takes the consequences of His wrath and judgement into and upon himself. And so the foolishness of the cross reveals the Wisdom of God, unveiling a dimension of divine mercy within and above the wrath of God.[94]

The cross of Christ is also a revelation of the power of God. For God's sovereignity over history is established and his triumph over evil is effected, not by the destruction of sinners, but in a way no one anticipated, by his own bearing of man's sin.[95] In the various events of Christ's life but above all by his death is this accomplished. For Christ shows that the human heart contradicts its own true essence and reveals the power of God to overcome the rebellious contradiction of man by *forgiveness.* "The Christian answer to the human predicament is a divine mercy toward man revealed in Christ," both power and forgiveness.[96]

With Christ the kingdom of God has come, that is to say that the true meaning of history as subject to the sovereignity of God has been revealed and history's meaning has been fulfilled: God's sovereignity over history has been established. Yet the kingdom of God will come. For God's dominion over history

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[93] "The *wisdom* apprehended in Christ finally clarifies the character of God. He has a resource of mercy beyond His law and judgement but He can make it effective only as He takes the consequences of His wrath and judgement, upon and into Himself." HD, p. 57.

[94] HD, p. 57. Niebuhr expresses this same dialectic between God's justice and his mercy, between Divine judgement and Forgiveness, in all his major writings: "The divine sovereignty, which gives it meaning. (man's historical existence) is revealed to have an ultimate resource of mercy and forgiveness, beyond judgement." FH, p. 139.

[95] HD, p. 48.

[96] CRPP, p. 182.

has not been fully established. An element of contradiction in history does remain. What is this element of contradiction? It is sin. With the death of Christ on the cross "*sin is overcome in principle but not in fact.* Love must continue to be suffering love rather than triumphant love." [97]

The fact that God can not overcome evil without displaying in history his purpose to take the effects of evil upon and into himself means that the divine mercy can not become effective until the seriousness of sin is known. The cross reveals to the sinner what sin does to God. Realizing finally what sin truly is the sinner giver way to despair. This despair need not destroy the sinner. It is a necessary prelude to the contrition or sorrow of heart which appropriates divine forgiveness.[98] In the entire process faith is presupposed since we are dealing with truths which transcend the human situation.[99]

Christ is not only the Son of God. He is also the second Adam; he is the perfect norm of human nature. What is this norm precisely? It is a norm that is already given in the analysis of human selfhood.[101] We have already seen that man's essential nature is present to him as a realization of what he ought to be. His transcendent self in its radical freedom requires that he live in relations of love with God and his neighbour. The revelation of Christ as second Adam does not create but clarifies the nature of this norm of love which existential man experiences as a demand or requirement of his essential self. This love mani-

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[97] HD, p. 51.

[98] "Without this despair there is no possibility of the contrition which appropriates the divine forgiveness. It is in this contrition and in this appropriation of divine mercy and forgiveness that the human situation is fully understood and overcome." HD, p. 59.

[99] ..."This final revelation ... must be constantly apprehended inwardly by faith, because it is a truth which transcends the human situation..." *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[100] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[101] "Man knows both by experience and by the demand for coherence in his rational nature, that life ought not to be lived at cross purposes, that conflict within the self, and between the self and others, is an evil. In that sense love is the law of life according to the insights of natural religion and morality." HD, p. 85 see SDH, p. 232.

fested by Christ on the cross is Agape, sacrificial, disinterested love.[102] Christ reveals this love as the norm of human nature and also reveals that this sacrificial love, the norm and perfection of man is not attainable in history.[103] For sacrificial love transcends history — it can not maintain itself in history. From the standpoint of history mutual love is the highest good. The life and above all the death of Christ on the cross indicate that Agape can not maintain itself in history which is composed of competing, conflicting interests and where mutual love is the highest level of love. Yet Agape is not irrelevant for history. It is related to mutual love and the relationship is a paradoxical one.[104]

1. Agape completes what is lacking in mutual love. "Sacrificial love (agape) completes the incompleteness of mutual love (eros), for the latter is always arrested by reason of the fact that it seeks to relate life to life from the standpoint of the self and for the sake of the self's own happiness." [105]

2. It (Agape) clarifies the possibilities and limitations of mutual love. "A transcendent perfection which clarifies obscurities of history and defines the limits of what is possible in historic development." [106]

3. It contradicts or manifests the contradiction in all of our achievements of mutual love and justice, in so far as they all contain an admixture of sin.[107]

The most important point of Niebuhr's Christology we have not yet considered. Is Christ both God and man? How are the divine and human related in Christ? Niebuhr flatly rejects the answers given by the Council of Chalcedon. He finds them absurd, irrelevant and is convinced that they render faith superflous. They are absurd for how can divine and human qualities be attributed to the same person. This is logically impossible.

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[102] HD, p. 71.
[103] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[104] *Ibid.*, p. 73.
[105] HD, p. 86.
[106] HD, p. 90.
[107] *Ibid.*, p. 89, 93.

"It is even more impossible to affirm that the divine nature of Christ does not qualify the human qualities, or that the conditioned character of human existence is not in contradiction to the unconditoned character of the divine." [108] Moreover the teachings of Chalcedon are irrelevant for doctrines which define the sinlessness and perfection of Christ in metaphysical or legal terms can have no real illumination for human conduct. "If only a God-man, who transcends the conditions of finiteness absolutely, can define and delineate the norm of human existence, the contrition which contemplation of such a norm may prompt is quickly transmuted into complacency. For we must live our life under the conditions of finiteness and may therefore dismiss any ideal or norm as irrelevant which does not have to meet our conditions." [109] Finally efforts such as those of the Fathers at Chalcedon make faith superflous for they reduce the components of faith to a metaphysical system.[110]

Rejecting as he does the orthodox Christology, does Neibuhr adopt the liberal doctrine of Jesus as merely the good man who represents or incarnates all those human values which are worthy of the highest devotion? If we consult only his earlier works it would seem so.[111] But with the series of essays entitled *Beyond Tragedy* he clearly repudiates the liberal position. In the same book he clearly affirms his belief in the fact that the Son of God became man. "... the truth that the Word was made flesh outrages all the canons by which truth is usually judged. Yet it is the truth. The whole character of the Christian religion is involved in that affirmation." [112]

What Niebuhr desires to do is make the doctrine that the Word was made flesh religiously and morally meaningful. How does he achieve this? By focussing his attention exclusively on the Cross. The Atonenment gives content and meaning to the Incarnation. For on the cross Jesus reveals how Divine Agape

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[108] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[109] HD, p. 77.

[110] HD, p. 63.

[111] Paul Lehman, "The Christology of Reinhold Niebuhr," in *The Theology o fReinhold Niebuhr*, ed. by Kegley and Bretall, p. 254.

[112] BT, p. 14.

triumphs over Divine Justice without annulling it and He shows how man's essential nature is to live a life of Agape, how man contradicts his essential nature by sinning and what God has endured for man's sin.

One is distressed by the ambiguity of Niebuhr's teaching regarding Christ. A well-known professor at Catholic University reveals the ambiguity of Niebuhr's teaching about Christ when he says, "We must admit that we do not know whether or not Professor Niebuhr believes that Christ is God." [113] The majority of those who write about Niebuhr's theology simply glide over the fact that Niebuhr's statements about Christ are equivocal. One German writer is convinced that Niebuhr has a doctrine of the true divinity and humanity of Christ although this same writer admits that his Christology is the most unsatisfactory part of Niebuhr's thought.[114] On the other hand Father Gustav Weigel writes: "Jesus of Nazareth (for Niebuhr) was a man like any other. He cannot be the God of the Nicene Creed, because God is "totally other," and therefore Jesus of Nazareth was a sinner no less than the rest of us. However through faith in God, Agape was his norm of life, and Agape is divinity working in humanity, and so Jesus as a symbol of Agape is divinity working in humanity, and so Jesus as a symbol of Agape is the Son of God." [115]

Our position is that Niebuhr does believe in the divinity of Christ but that in rejecting the formulas of Chalcedon he falls into extreme ambiguity in his statements about Christ so that the reader is left bewildered and above all unconvinced that Christ is genuinely important for Niebuhr's theology. We will return to these points later.

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[113] Edmond Bernard, in *American Ecclesiastical Review*, Nov. 1944, p. 326.

[114] Richard Neubauer, *op. cit.*

[115] Gustav Weigel, *A Survey of Protestant Theology in Our Day*, pp. 35, 36.

## Chapter Two

# NIEBUHR'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

A theologian, reading the summary of Niebuhr's doctrine on justification which follows, will be surprised and a bit non plused not by what is said but by what is left unsaid. Both in the popular press and in theological journals Niebuhr is constantly termed "neo-orthodox." Certainly in comparison with liberal theologians he merits the term. For he returns again and again to the fact that man is a sinner, a fact that liberals in theology tend to stumble over or hurry by. And he also resembles the reformers in the way he seizes on one powerful insight and orders his theology around it. But if justification was the centre of theology for the reformers, if they treated the problems it raises in never ending discussion and debate, then Niebuhr can scarcely be admitted to their company. For a careful reading of Niebuhr against the background of Luthers thought reveals that:

*a.* Niebuhr simply accepts without careful examination and critical analysis certain doctrines of the reformers, for example.

1. forensic justice
2. justifying faith
3. the fact that the redeemed remain sinners-simul justus et peccator
4. certain moral imperatives are impossible to keep
5. the juistified is capable of good works but these works are not meritorious.

*b.* He rejects other points that were essential to Luther's doctrine but by simply passing over them in silence.

1. He has no analysis of the salvific sense of the justice of God as found in Romans, 1:17

2. Faith is a word Niebuhr uses but never defines. He uses it in the sense of intellectual assent to revealed truth and also in the sense of fides fiducialis without ever seeking to relate the two meanings or to connect faith with agape.

3. He makes no mention of the doctrine of certitude of faith which was so necessary a part of Luther's doctrine.

4. He makes almost no reference to baptism, a doctrine which Luther treated with seriousness and respect.

*c.* It is only when Niebuhr's own anthropology is concerned and perhaps threatened that he enters into a serious examination and extended treatment of certain aspects of the doctrine of justification.

1. Niebuhr can not accept Luther's notion of the imago Dei as totally destroyed by sin; his own basic insight is that man's radical freedom is his very essence and that it remains after sin.

2. Man is thus not passive in the process of justification. He actually cooperates with the justifying action of God.

3. Yet even the justified man can not escape the contradiction which lies at the heart of human freedom. Man is justus et peccator simul.

Why mention these facts? What is the point of this criticism? We raise these points in order to explain why certain parts of the doctrine of justification which were discussed and debated both by the Reformers and by the Council of Trent find little or no mention in the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr.

Some students of Niebhr see his doctrine of justification as the most generally misunderstood part of his theology. Whether this is correct or not all who are interested in Niebuhr's theology see the important place of the doctrine of justification in his

thought. "Often commentators have used Niebuhr's doctrine of justification by faith as the Archimedian position for explaining his whole thought. It must, however, be understood that Niebuhr is not simply reviving a past dogma without careful qualification and even considerable redefinition." [1]

The New Testament uses the word grace in a twofold sense: as the power of God over man and as the power of God in man. Christian theologians have ever sought to relate these two aspects of grace without causing one to exclude the other.

1) Grace is "... on the one hand the mercy and forgiveness of God by which He completes what man cannot complete and overcomes the sinful elements in all of man's achievements. Grace is the power of God over man." [2]

2) "Grace is on the other hand the power of God in man; it represents an accession of resources, which man does not have of himself, enabling him to become what he truly ought to be. It is synonymous with the gift of the 'Holy Spirit.' ... The spirit of God indwelling in man." [3]

Niebuhr emphasizes the consistency in Christian thought between the basic conviction that fulfillment of man must come from beyond himself and the realization that man alone or collectively cannot complete his own life and his desperate effort to do so only results in sin.[4]

Moreover, ..."man perceives the completeness beyond his incompleteness and the holiness beyond his sin only by faith." [5]

Turning to St. Paul Niebuhr asserts that both aspects of the *experience* of grace — "the conquest of sin in the heart of man on the one hand, and the merciful power of God over the sin which is never entirely overcome in any human heart, on the other" — are found in St. Paul's doctrine and yet the relation between these two aspects (Grace as pardon, as power) is not so

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[1] J. Wolf, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Man"; in *Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. by Kegley and Bretall (New York: 1956) p. 247.

[2] HD, p. 102.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 102, 103.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

clearly stated as to prevent one sided doctrines of grace from seeking support in Paul's writings.[6]

The proper balance is found when man is seen as *simul justus et peccator.* Niebuhr gives complete approval to the German theologian Schlatter's description of the balance between the two aspects of grace.

> "He (the justified sinner) has a sense of sin, as including and comprehending all his actions, and yet at the same time and in the same consciousness he has a good conscience which is at peace with itself and is conscious of the normality of its actions. Both of these aspects of his consciousness are rooted and united in the awareness of the divine forgiveness and the sense of a righteousness which divine grace has imparted." [7]

As this quote indicates and as Niebuhr constantly asserts, one cannot make an absolute distinction between the old life and the new. Niebuhr admits that certain texts in St. Paul would favour such an *absolute distinction,* he explicitly refers to Rom. VIII 6, "To be carnally minded is death, but be spiritually minded is life and peace," and Rom. VI 22, — "But now, being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life." But Paul often accompanies these texts with the injunction — "do not sin any more" — this means that the obvious meaning of the statement, you are now sinless — is not quite accurate. It actually means "... self-love has been destroyed in principle in your life. See to it now that the new principle of devotion to God in Christ is actualized in your life." [8] It seems unlikely that St. Paul's notion of holiness ever signifies complete freedom from sin.

Certainly Paul is aware of the contrast between the life which is governed by the *principle* of self-centredness and one which

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[6] "In this way St. Paul's thought has become the fountain source of both perfectionist theories of grace and of the protest of Reformation thought against them." HD, p. 105.

[7] A. Schlatter, *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament,* p. 503; as quoted in HD, p. 105.

[8] HD, p. 106.

is governed by the *principle* of devotion and obedience to God.[9]

But he is equally aware of the danger of sinning for those who have broken with sin in principle.[10] A final qualification that must embarrass perfectionists is the personal disavowal Paul makes of perfection. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." Phill. III-12.

It is of the greatest importance according to Niebuhr to see that no essential contradiction exists in Pauline thought but the *primary emphasis* lies on Paul's idea of grace as . . ." justification, as the *assurance* of *divine forgiveness.*" [11]

Niebuhr accepts the doctrine of the reformers on forensic justification. Man has a peace of soul not by confidence in his own righteousness but by the assurance of divine forgiveness and by faith. "The Christ who is apprehended by faith, i.e. to whom the soul is obedient in principle, "imputes" his righteousness to it. It is not an actual possession except "by faith." [12]" Niebuhr sees many problems related to this doctrine of imputed righteousness. It is attacked by moralists for the non-moral character of this imputed righteousness. Yet these men fail to see, that the forgiveness of divine love is beyond the categories of good and evil.[13]

But this doctrine affirms what others obscure or forget:

*a*) "the sinful corruption in human life on every level of goodness."[14]

*b*) "the pride of sin is greatest when men claim to have conquered sin completely." [15]

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

[10] Here Niebuhr speaks of the *danger* or *possibility* of sinning as remaining in the life of the redeemed: "But his injunction to the sinless, not to sin any more, implies that he understands the possibility of sinning for those who have broken with sin in principle." HD, p. 106. As his thought will reveal, he actually means the *inevitability* of sinning as the true condition of the justified.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[13] "But forgiveness, as a form of love which is beyond good and evil, is bound to be offensive to pure moralists." HD, p. 108.

[14] HD, p. 108.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

*c*) men thus need mercy which is made available to them only through Christ, "whose sufferings disclose the wrath of God against sin, and whose perfection as man is accepted as normative for the believer, by the same faith which sees in Him, particularly His Cross, the revelation of the mystery of the divine mercy triumphing over, without annulling, the divine wrath." [16]

There are acknowledged dangers in this doctrine of imputed righteousness. It can lead to complacency about sin. Or it may be so smothered in juridical and legal terminology that it fails to reach or encounter man in the core of his being.[17]

Yet all this does not "change the profundity of the conception of "justification by faith" and its complete conformity with the conception of life, God and history as we have it in the gospels." [18]

Niebuhr's ultimate concern is to show the relevance of the doctrine of justification by faith to the moral and spiritual experience of man. He does this by showing how the experience described by St. Paul in Gal II: 20-21 corresponds to the facts of human experience. The text in St. Paul is: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

"I am crucified with Christ."

The sinful self must be shattered. Alluding to the doctrine of original sin Niebuhr asserts that because of original sin, the self cannot do the good that it intends. The self in action seems impotent to realize that which the transcendent self sees as requirements of its essential being. Instead of a loving relation to God and its fellows (the law of its essential being) the self in its all-consuming self-love makes itself the center of existence and

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[16] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

[17] "It (the doctrine of justification by faith) can become a vehicle of complacency, prompting men to 'continue in sin that grace may abound.' It may be interpreted in juridical and legalistic terms in such a way that it never conveys the religious truth which strikes man in the very centre of his spiritual being." HD, p. 108.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

is not able to fulfill its obligations as free spirit. This is due not only to its natural survival impulse but due to its tendency to rationalize and clothe its own selfish interest in the garb of lofty universal goals. The self must be shattered, i.e. it must become conscious of its sinful, self-centered state. "The self is shattered whenever it is confronted by the power and holiness of God and becomes genuinely conscious of the real source and centre of all life. In Christian faith Christ mediates the confrontation of the self by God; for it is in Christ that the vague sense of the divine, which human life never loses, is crystallized into a revelation of a divine mercy and judgement. In that revelation fear of judgement and hope of mercy are so mingled that despair induces repentance and repentance hope." [19]

"Nevertheless I live" —

The shattered self passes from despair through repentance and hope to an experience of new life — the reborn Christian experiences a new selfhood: "The new self is more truly a real self because the vicious circle of self-centeredness has been broken. The self lives in and for others, in the general orientation of loyalty to, and love of, God; who alone can do justice to the freedom of the self over all partial interests and values. This new self is the real self; for the self is infinitely transcendent; and any premature centering of itself around its own interests, individually or collectively, destroys and corrupts its freedom." [20]

This new life the new self feels is due to a power and grace from beyond itself.[21]

"Yet not I; but Christ liveth in me."

What is the meaning of this expression? Could it mean the self's awareness that the source of its new life is a power and grace it has received or could this expression of Paul's mean that "the new self is never an accomplished reality"; [22] . . . that, there-

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[19] *Ibid.*, p. 113.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 114.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 114.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

fore, the new self is the Christ of intention rather than an actual achievement. It is the self only by faith, in the sense that its dominant purpose and intention are set in the direction of Christ as the norm. It is the self only by grace, in the sense that the divine mercy "imputes" the perfection of Christ and accepts the selfs intentions for achievements." [23]

Yet why choose between these two aspects of justification when human experience testifys that both aspects are present in the awareness of the justified man, for the justified knows he possesses something *he could not posses* of himself and he is also aware of not possessing it finally but having it only by faith.[24]

Here in his analysis of justification Niebuhr encounters the problem which every theologian dealing with grace must face up to. What is the relation between grace and free will? Niebuhr's discussion of this problem is most brief (as was Thomas'). He sees the reformation theology, especially calvinistic theology, tending toward a divine determinism which is true also of Barth's theology.[25] Such a theology as experience shows can easily cause moral irresponsibility. Thomas Aquinas careful effort to do justice to both grace and free will seems more correct. But Aquinas defines the spheres and limits of God's and man's activity too sharply and he tends to see both divine and human activity as operating on the same level. [26]

> "The real situation is that both affirmations — that only God in Christ can break and reconstruct the sinful self, and that the self must "open the door" and is capable of doing so — are equally true; and they are both unqualifiedly true, each on their own level. Yet either affirmation becomes false if it is made without reference to the other." [27]

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[23] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

[25] "This [divine determinism] is exactly the danger which Reformation theology, and more particularly Calvinistic theology runs in its doctrines of predestination; and this tendency, has been re-affirmed in the modern radical Reformation thought of Barth." HD, p. 120.

[26] Niebuhr seems to quote the following passage in *St. Thomas,* I-II, q. 109, a. 6.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

To return to the Pauline text "And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Does this text contain both connotations or both aspects of the experience of grace? Niebuhr hesitates to answer this. But whether this text contains the doctrine or not, is not of great importance. For certainly St. Paul's doctrine taken as a whole does teach both aspects of the experience of grace: grace as new life, grace as forgiveness.

The more important question at the moment is whether experience validates this double concept or double aspect of grace? Here one must be as precise as possible to preclude misunderstanding. When we speak of experience in this context, we rule out at once any natural experience that could validate the doctrine of grace. For only an experience that has its origins outside of man can validate a doctrine which is beyond the limits of human knowledge and can only be apprehended by faith. So "the experience which validates the doctrine can only be prompted by the doctrine itself." [28]

But what precisely are we seeking to validate in experience. The basic truth of the doctrine of justification by faith: sin is overcome in principle, but not in fact. Or to express the matter in more concrete personal terms, whether "experience justifys the assertion that the conscience remains uneasy even in the highest reaches of achievement in the new life." [29]

There are two possible answers to the question, one dictated by logic and the other by experience. "It is logical to assume that when man has become aware of the character of his self love and of its incompatibility with the divine will, this very awareness would break its power." [30] Not only does it seem logical to predict that the justified sinner will behave thus, experience itself partially validates this assumption. For repentance does initiate a new life.

But if we take a larger more comprehensive view of experience we come to a conclusion sharply at odds with that of logic.

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[28] HD, p. 59.
[29] HD, p. 125.
[30] HD, p. 126.

*a*) Consider the experience of Christian history: "The sorry annals of Christian fanatacism, of unholy religious hatreds, of sinful ambitions hiding behind the cloak of religious sanctity, of political power impulses compounded with pretensions of devotion to God, offer the most irrefutable proof of the error in every Christian doctrine and every interpretation of the Christian experience which claim that grace can remove the final contradiction between man and God." [31]

*b*) Weigh the testimony of moral sceptics of all ages. They have been able to challenge the pretension of the saints. Not without danger, it is true. For they lack a "principle of interpreting life which can save them from alternate moods of scepticism and fanatacism. But that does not change the fact that a moral sceptic, who regards all truth and all goodness as merely a cloak of self-interest, does at least understand the perennial egoistic corruption of truth and goodness." [32]

*c*) Examine an individual life or social achievement in history: they all reveal that "there are infinite possiblities of organizing life beyond the centre of the self; and equally infinite possibilities of drawing the self back into the centre of organization." [33] Whatever draws the self out of itself is the fruit of grace. "Yet the possibilities of new evil cannot be avoided by grace;" [34] The demands of the child and the ends of family life can combine to produce self-forgetfullness and genuine love in parents. But this very love can become an instrument of parental power impulse on a higher or more subtle level. The experience of families in relation to the community, the experience of nations in dealing with one another, also validate the basic fact that grace is a "having and a not having"; "for so long as the self, individual or collective, remains within the tensions of history and is subject to the two-fold condition of involvement in process and transcendence over it, it will be subject to the sin of over-estimating its

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[31] HD, p. 126.
[32] HD, p. 127.
[33] HD, p. 127.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

transcendence and of compounding its interests with those which are more inclusive." [35] These two aspects of grace, "it is a having and yet not having, a standing beyond the contradiction, and yet standing in it. It is justification of the sinner, who, though justified continues to the last days of his earthly life to be a sinner and is as much in need of forgiveness as on the day of his conversion," [36] may offend the canons of logic but they are in perfect accord with the complex facts of experience.

To see clearly Niebuhr's doctrine of justification it will be very useful to follow his thought as he criticizes other Christian theologians treating de Gratia. For observing Niebuhr's own thought in action we can see more precisely where he places the emphasis in the ensemble of truths which the doctrine of justification includes. In the early Church Fathers Niebuhr sees an inability to grasp grace in its twofold aspect as a having, and a not having of Truth, virtue and grace.[37]

These early Fathers, did not place the problem of sin and its solution in the atonement of Christ at the Centre of theology. They subordinated justification to sanctification and they tendedto view Christianity simply as a way to achieve the eternal and acquire perfection. St. John Chrysostom is the best representative of these perfectionists. Speaking of the effects of sanctifying grace on the baptized soul he does not hesitate to declare "Grace touches the soul itself and tears up sin by the roots — the soul of him who is baptized — is purer than the rays of the sun, and such as it was originally begotten; nay rather far better than this; for it enjoys the spirit which sets it on fire on all sides and extends its holiness. The Holy Spirit recasting it by baptism as in a furnace and consuming its sins causes it to shine more purely than any pure gold." [38]

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[35] HD, p. 128.

[36] Emil Brunner, *Theology of Crisis*, p. 63 as quoted in HD, p. 129.

[37] This inability Niebuhr attributes to the fact ... "that human self-esteem resists the truth of the Christian gospel almost as vigorously within the bounds of a faith which has ostensibly accepted it as it was resisted by the pre-Christian ages." HD, p. 131.

[38] Homil: In Epist. I ad Cor. xv, 1-2.

It represents for Niebuhr the triumph of Hellenism over Hebraism and also an inability on the Church's part to grasp that part of the gospel which is directed against it.[39]

In the matter of grace even St. Augustine, whom Niebuhr greatly admires, does not prove satisfactory. "For Augustine's doctrine of grace blunts and obscures the complex relation between grace as pardon and grace as power."[40] In company with the earlier Fathers Augustine also subordinates justification to sanctification. By the power of the divine mercy mediated through Christ the contradiction between man and God is taken away and the soul turns away from self-love to obedience. Self-love remains but only as venial, as incidental, not as the expression of a basic attitude. Although Augustine does not admit absolute perfection in this life, yet man can be moving perfectly toward this goal of perfection.[41] To Niebuhr these notions contain the roots of a new self-righteousness and are simply another effort on man's part to complete his own life and history.[42] Augustine does not fully recognize the "persistent power of self-love" and the corruptive egoism present at every level of moral achievement.[43] And Augustine does not seem to be aware of the fact that the Church itself stands under divine judgement.[44]

From Augustine to Thomas the doctrine on grace shows little variation. Catholic doctrine which is definitive in St. Thomas is in basic opposition to reformation insights. In *Catholicism.*

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[39] Niebuhr's chief objection to the early Church Fathers, e.g. Justin Martyr, Origin, Clement of Alexandria, is that while they see grace and truth as gifts of Christ, "the paradox of our having and not having them is not understood." HD, p. 135.

[40] Niebuhr finds "perfectionist doctrine in two statements of Augustine taken from 'De perfectione justitiae hominis' ": *a*) "ingredi autem sine macula non absurde etiam ille dicitur, non qui jam perfectus est, sed qui ad ipsam perfectionem irreprehensibiliter currit, carens criminibus damnabilibus atque ipsa peccata venialia non neglegens mundare elemosynis." Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum. Vol. xxxxii, chp. 20, p. 20. Here Niebuhr finds the objectionable doctrine of venial sin.

1) Original sin is considered as the loss of an original perfection, that is a donum *super additum*, not properly required by human nature.

2) Grace is the completion of an imperfect nature; *for the reformation*:

1) Original sin is the corruption of the image of God in man.

2) Nature and grace are in contradiction.[45]

Niebuhr sees Catholic doctrine as a nice balance of hellenistic and biblical notions. For Catholicism asserts man can complete life and history (Hellenism), but this completion is not due to his own efforts alone but with the aid of divine grace (Biblical).[46]

Catholicism does not grasp the full extent of the effects of Original Sin. It does not appreciate the persistence of self-love in the life of the redeemed. It does not comprehend the tragic dimensions of man's spiritual life which the reformation thinkers brought to light (i.e. grace and truth as a having and not having.)[47]

The reformation interprets grace primarly not as the power of God in man but as power (forgiveness) of God toward man; it denies that individual life or man's collective existence can be brought to the degree of completion that Catholic theories imply.[48]

As we have noted before, Niebuhr's own doctrine on justification reveals its own points of emphasis as he evaluates the doctrines of others. This is especialy and obviously true of his study of Luther.[49]

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[41] "quotquot ergo perfecto, hoc sapiamus; id est: quotquot perfecte currimus, hoc sapiamus, quod nondum perfecto sumus, ut illic perficiamur, quo perfecte ad huc currimus, . . ." *ibid.*, chp. 19, p. 17.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 140.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 143.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 192 ff.

Niebuhr sees the major contribution of the reformation as one of making the Christian conscience "most fully aware of the persistence of sin in the life of the redeemed." Both [50] Luther and Calvin sought to be true to the twofold biblical presentation of grace. But they did not arrive at identical conclusions.

Luther's approach to the doctrine of justification was guided by two insights:

1) His own experience that no final peace or righteousness could be found in the monastic way to perfection.

2) His observation that the Church's claims to perfection led only to spiritual pride and self-righteousness.[51]

Niebuhr considers the strength and the weaknesses of Luther's doctrine. Luther's strong points as presented by Niebuhr are the following:

1) Luther does not deny that grace is a source of new life.[52] By faith the soul so cleaves to Christ that all his virtues flow into it.

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[50] *Ibid.*, p. 191 ff., 205 ff.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 192 ff.

[52] 1) "Since the promises of God are words of holiness, truth, righteousness, liberty and peace, and are full of universal goodness, the soul, which cleaves to them with a firm faith, is so united to them, nay thoroughly absorbed by them, that it not only partakes of, but is thoroughly saturated by all their virtues." *On Christian Liberty*, p. 261, quoted by Niebuhr, HD, pp. 192-193; Cf. P. Althaus, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

2) "Thus from faith flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a cheerful willing free spirit, disposed to serve our neighbour voluntarily, without taking into account any gratitude or ingratitude, praise or blame, gain or loss." *On Christian Liberty*, p. 270; quoted by Niebuhr, HD, p. 193.

3) "A Christian, being consecrated by his faith, does good works; but he is not by these works made a more sacred person or more a Christian. This is the effect of faith alone." *Ibid.*, p. 275. quoted by Niebuhr HD, p. 193.

4) Niebuhr gives no citation from Luther on this point. Yet no one would dispute this point.

5) Niebuhr again gives no citation from Luther. He obviously has in mind such statements as the following: "Vermaledeit sei das Leben, darin jemand sich selber lebt und nicht seinem Nachsten. Und wiederum:

2) He interprets the power of righteousness psychologically as the motive of love and gratitude to God.

3) Though the new life is capable of a new righteousness it is not justified by the good works that flow from this new life.

4) He places a new emphasis on the place of forgiveness in grace.

5) He has a profound grasp of the meaning of Christian Agape as disinterested love. The ethic of Christ is definitive for the Christian in his personal attitudes and individual relationshpis.[53]

The defects in Luther's doctrine are the following:

1) The tendency toward quietism in some of his writings. "Without works" degenerates into "without action". He speaks of a mere passive righteousness.

2) A fear of action since every new action may be tainted with a new pride.

3) So much concern for the transcending Christian law of love that he neglects the import and moral obligation attaching to lesser law.

4) Though his doctrine need not lead to antinomianism it is indifferent to relative moral discriminations.

5) In particular Luther was defeatist in seeing no relevance of the doctrine of perfect love to aiding man in his quest for a measure of justice in society.

6) A lack of standards for achieving relative justice.

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Gebenedeit sei das Leben darin einer nicht sich, sondern seinem Nächsten lebt und dient mit Lehre, mit strafen, mit hilfe, wie es mag geschehen." Wa, 10, III, 98, 6.

[53] 1) This most excellent righteousness of faith ... which God through Christ imputeth to us without works, is neither political nor ceremonial, nor the righteousness of God's law, nor consisteth in works, but is clean contrary: that is to say, a *mere* passive righteousness ... *Commentary* on *Galatians*, xciii: quoted by Niebuhr in HD, p. 195.

2) Niebuhr gives no citations from Luther for this and the remaining points of criticism which he raises against Luther.

As regards Calvin, Niebuhr believes that Calvin's doctrine of justification by faith is almost identical with that of Luther. However Calvin's doctrine of sanctification is scarcely distinguishable from that of Rome and is unacceptable.

When Calvin is writing against Rome his position is scarcely distinguishable from that of Luther. Thus he can write in the Institutes: "there never was an action performed by a pious man, which if examined by the scrutinizing eye of divine justice would not deserve condemnation." [54]

But in developing his own doctrine of sanctification his position is almost identical with the Catholic one: "our carnal desires are daily more and more mortified, and we are sanctified, that is consecrated unto the Lord unto real purity of life, having our hearts molded to obey His laws so that our *prevaling inclination* is to submit to His will." [55]

Not even Calvin maintains the paradox of grace and the new life as a having and not having.

*Conclusion to Chapter on Justification*

Here then is Niebuhr's doctrine of justification. It is a doctrine which involves a delicate balancing of two aspects of grace: grace as new life (Deus in nobis), grace as forgiveness, (Deus pro nobis).

According to Niebuhr St. Paul clearly sought to maintain this balance. But both the early Church Fathers and the medieval church broke the tension and destroyed the balance between the two aspects of grace by subordinating grace as forgiveness to grace as new life or sanctification. Doing this led to perfectionist doctrines and claims for Christian holiness that human experience never validates.

The Renaissance and the Reformation both sought to formulate this paradox of grace as a having and a not having. But each took one side of the paradox, obscuring the other. So Renaissance thinkers affirmed only the endless possibilities and

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[54] Inst., III, XIV, II; quoted in HD, p. 206.
[55] Inst., III, XIV, 9; cited in HD, p. 207.

development for man and too easily forgot that these possibilities are for both good and evil. Reformation thinkers tended to weigh or overstress the other side of the paradox, grace as forgiveness, Deus pro nobis. Seeing the inevitability of sin, and the corruption of truth and goodness at every level, realizing the most basic human need is forgiveness, they tended to obscure the fact that man in grace truly has possibilities for growing in wisdom and charity.

What is neeeded today is a synthesis in which both aspects of the paradox of grace are properly affirmed and correctly placed in relation to one another.

In our two final chapters we will strive to see if Niebuhr has succeeded in doing this.

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CHAPTER THREE

# THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION AT THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

On December 13, 1545 in the Church of the Most Holy Trinity, the Bishop of Feltre, in cope and mitre, entered the pulpit to read the papal Bull "Laetare Jerusalem" convoking the Council of Trent.[1] Despite years of papal dissembling and vacillation, in the face of continual imperial and royal interference, the council which all Christendom wanted and badly needed, was now in session.

Faced by constant rumours and threats of war, under continual political pressure, the Fathers of Trent began a task which would have been difficult even in optimal conditions: To measure the statements of the Reformers against traditional Catholic doctrine; To condemn whatever was opposed to that doctrine and to reaffirm the true Catholic teaching.

The Council began its first working session on December 18, 1545.[2] On June 21, 1546 it opened discussion on the most difficult problem of all, the question of justification.[3] As Cardinal Cervini pointed out, it was a question that had never been treated as such by any previous council.[4] Moreover none of the earlier theologians, apart from Saint Thomas Aquinas, had treated the doctrine of justification extensively.[5] And yet is was this very

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[1] Thomas Campegius, Bishop of Feltre and famous jurist, played a leading role at the council both as lawyer and theologian. Cf. H. Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, (New York: 1961), Vol. I, p. 574.

[2] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 535.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 537.

[4] . . . "cum alias decisus non fuerit in conciliis." CT, V, p. 557. Cervini was the most active of the papal legates and the most influential in deciding the final decree.

doctrine which for the reformers was at the heart of Christianity. Luther was prepared to yield on other points; regarding justification he was determined to concede nothing.[6]

The sixteenth century was not a time noted for calm, dispassionate argument nor for any earnest effort to understand one's opponent. Thus it is remarkable that the papal legate, the Englishman Cardinal Pole, could warn the Fathers and Theologians not to condemn the Reformers out of hand; but "to read their writings carefully and not simply say, Luther said this, therefore it is false."[7] The acts of the council reveal how well taken was this advice. For members of the council made a constant effort to get behind party slogans and formulas to the true doctrine.

Moreover the Fathers were constantly aware of their pastoral office and their responsibilities to the faithful. Thus they sought to present a doctrine of justification which all could grasp. Hence they made a conscious and constant effort to use biblical terms. They sought to avoid the technical terminology of the schools whenever posible and they studiously refused to settle problems touching on the doctrine of justification on, which the various theologians were sharply divided.[8]

Everyone who reads the acts of the Council of Trent must be impresed at the edudition, and constancy of purpose displayed

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[5] Jedin, *po. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 172.

[6] "Von diesem Artikel kann man nichts weichen oder nachegeben, es falle Himmel und Erde oder was nicht bleiben will. ... Auf diesem Artikel steht alles was wir wider den Papst, Teufel, Welt lehren und leben." W.A. 50, 199, 22.31. As cited in P. Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh: 1962), p. 195.

"In colloquies or formal debates with opponents, when some concession on points of doctrine was the obvious condition of any working agreement, this was the one point on which he would make no concession." J. S. Whale, *The Protestant Tradition,* (London: 1959), p. 43.

[7] "Illud autem velim a patribus observari, ut libros omnes, etiam adversariorum, non ut adversariorum, sed ut cujuslibet alterius, legant, et nolint protinus dicere: id Luterus (sic) dixist, ergo falsum est;" CT, I, p. 82.

[8] See the votum of Seripando where he urges his peers to keep this in mind: "Doctrina de justificatione aperta esse debet, clara et facilis, quia cum sit scientia salutis in remissionem peccatorum, ad omnes tam doctos quam rudes, tam magnos quam parvos, tam sapientes quam insipientes pertinet." CT, XII, p. 613.

by the theologians and Fathers. Work and discussion on the chapter on justification lasted from June until January. The final decree was the fourth draft. Every paragraph, every sentence, almost every word of each draft was examined, discussed and often emended.[9]

For those who follow the work of the Second Vatican Council the small number who took part in the discusisons and debates at Trent is perhaps surprising.[10] But just as surprising was their quality. Among the "minor theologians" were men of extraordinary ability and erudition: the renowned Soto, the Spanish Dominican considered the greatest theorist of his time; the Franciscan De Vega and the Jesuits, Salmeron, Laynez and Jay. Among the bishops and heads of religious orders were Catherinus, the brilliant, abrasive Dominican, newly appointed bishop, and Seripando, head of the Augustinian order to which Luther also belonged, and also Cardinal Cervini, later to be elevated to the papacy, who was not only one of the presiding officers but a renowned humanist, and theologian.

One can easily, too easily in fact, label the various theologians and Fathers as Thomists, Scotists or Augustinians, and state that all who were Dominican, Franciscan or Augustinian were ipso facto consistent followers of Thomas, Scotus or Augustine. Yet this would be seriously misleading. A Dominican like Catherinus will regularly take positions opposed to St. Thomas. Some of the Scotists will abandon their master on important points to follow St. Thomas and there was no uniformity of opinion among the Augustinians. Moreover the Jesuits who played a very important role at the council seemed to draw from all three schools. "Es handelt sich nicht so sehr um eine von der Autorität der Orden uber wachte strenge Einheit der Lehre innerhalb eines festes Systemes, sondern um eine ungefahr gleiche theologische Richtung die sich einen grössern Lehrer der

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[9] For example see the discussion of the first draft of the decree: CT, V, pp. 392 ff., p. 402 ff.

[10] At the time there were over four hundred ordinaries who could have taken part. Only twenty-nine or thirty (the count of Massarelli and Severoli varies) attended the session of January 7, 1546. Jedin, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 575.

Vergangenheit anlehnt."[11] Only to this extent can one speak of schools as represented at the council.

We have already noted that the purpose of the council was to measure the statements of the reformers against traditional Catholic teaching. It soon became obvious that in the matter of justification certain propositions held by the Reformers could not be reconciled with Catholic doctrine. Among them were the following: [12]

*a*) Free will in the order of salvation is non existent.

*b*) In the process of justification man is completely passive.

*c*) Faith alone justifies in the sense that faith excludes other dispositions, indeed any human activity prior to justification.

*d*) That in justification sin is not truly taken away; man is only declared just by a forensic justification.

*e*) That the works of the justified are only signs of justice achieved, not works that merit an increase of justice and eternal life.[13]

With a few exceptions [14] all those present rejected these statements extracted from the writings of the Reformers. Their

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[11] E. Stakemeier, *Glaube und Rechtfertigung*, (Freiburg in Br.: 1937) p. 6.

[12] Taken from a list drawn up by Salmeron.

[13] Salmeron was one of the fathers most conversant with the writings of the Reformers. His list follows: "Videntur autem mihi hi errores a sacrosancta synoda expungendi circa materiam justificationis. Primus est de voce, quia *justitia*, inquit *Melancthon, est non qua justi sumus*, sed *qua justi habemur, etiam non existentes*. Secundus, quod fides est fiducia divinae misericordiae apud Palum, cum tribuit illi justificationem. Tertius, quod faciens quod in se est, peccat mortaliter et quo magis conatur, magis peccat. Quartus: Fides sola ante adventum caritatis justificat, immo fides est ipsa justitia, et dilectio non justificat quia spectat ad legem. Quintus, quod homo ante gratiam est sine libero arbitrio et in justificatione mere passive se habet. Sextus, quod non est aliqua justitia inhaerens quae infundatur et per quam reddamur justi, sed fide apprehenditur justitia Christi imputata. Post justificationem autem plura perniciose docent ... quod non possumus mereri vitam aeternam." CT, V, pp. 281-282.

[14] For example, the papal conciliar commissary, Sanfelice. His language is the closest of all to that of Luther. In his votum delivered before the ge-

condemnation is contained in the 33 canons which follow the decree on justification.

In the work of preparing the "sana et vera doctrina" the minor theologians were asked to consider six questions.[15] The fathers were later asked to give their opinions regarding three possible states of the justified: (1) how does man first arrive at justice?[16] (2) How does the just man maintain and increase justice received? (3) How does man regain it once Lost?[17] It is clearly seen in the acts of the council that the theologians and Fathers, reflecting on the problems raised by these questions, were in basic agreement on a number of points.

(a) *The very meaning of justification*

The Spanish Jesuit, Salmeron, saw it as a process that can be actively and passively considered. *Passively* to be justified means to receive the gift of justice by which from unjust we become just as Augustine says.[17a] *Actively* to justify is to bestow justice which clearly God alone can accomplish.[17b] What then is justice? Not what Mclancthon says it is. To be justified is not to be considered just, for in the Scriptures many are said *to be just.*[17c] This justice is a gift which includes 1) remission of sins

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neral congregation on July 6, 1546, he attributes first justification to faith (in the lutheran sense) alone. According to the summary of his statements he said: "Nos fide sola acquirimus gratiam Dei et justificationem, sed caritate et spe, quae justificationem subsequuntur, acquirimus vitam aeternam et gloriam Dei." CT, V, p. 347.

[15] CT, V, p. 261.

[16] We shall deal with the question of the second state when discussing the double justice controversy.

[17] The third state is not immediately relevant in discussion with Niebuhr.

[17a] "Justificari ergo quoad nomen est recipere donum justitiae. Then he cites the 'De Spiritu et Littera' of St. Augustine (Migne, 44, 211), "Justus ex fide vivit haec est justitia Dei, Quae in testamento veteri velata in novo revelatur. Quae ideo dicitur justitia Dei, quod impartiendo eam justos facit." CT, V, p. 266.

[17b] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

[17c] "Tertio, quia multi dicuntur esse viri justi in Scriptura, ut Joseph, Matth., 1, 19: Cum esset vir justus." *Ibid.*, p. 266.

2) elevation of the creature to a share in the divine nature and adoption by God 3) a power of fulfilling the law 4) the right to glory.[17d] This justice is nothing else than charity as Augustine says.[18]

For the Franciscan, Baptista Castilloneus, justification considered actively is simply Christ; passively it is the passage from injustice to justice which is through faith and is present in us.[19]

The Dominican Laureus, upon whose notes the Secretary Massarelli was heavily dependent, used a most brief and Thomistic formula; "justification (quoad rem) is the remission of sins *through* grace." [20]

Equally succinct but favouring Scotistic doctrine is Castellimaris statement that justification is "the remission of sins *with* the infusion of grace." [21]

The Franciscan Pinarola (whose votum along with Salmeron's is the only complete one available from the first meetings of the minor theologians) sees justification as a spiritual change, a rectitude which grace or charity produce in us.[22]

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[17d] "... quod complectitur primo remissionem peccati, secundo elevationem creaturae in consortium divinae naturae et in adoptionem filiorum, tertio facultatem praestandi legem, et tandem quarto jus ad gloriam." *Ibid.*

[18] "non est aliud quam *caritas* ... quia Augustinus constantissime id docet." *Ibid.*

[19] "Justitia dicitur dupliciter: activa, quae est Christus, passiva, quae est transitus de injustitia ad justitiam, ad justitiam, quae est per fidem, et haec est in nobis." CT, V, p. 273. John Baptist of Castiglioni, a Franciscan Conventual, was provincial in Milan.

[20] "Justificatio quoad rem coram Deo est remissio peccatorum per gratiam." CT, V, p. 264. Laureus was from Calabria and was one of the eight Dominican theologians at the council.

[21] "Justificatio est remissio peccatorum cum infusione gratiae." CT, V, p. 299. Johannes Fonseca was Bishop of Castellamari from 1537-1550.

[22] "Justificatio enim nihil aliud est quam mutatio illa spiritualis, qua homo de injusto justus fit vel qua de justo justus fit magis. ... Justitia. ... nil aliud est quam ordinata quaedam rectitudo in interiori hominis dispositione collocata, qua id quod supremum est in homine, subditur Deo, et vires inferiores hominis rationi subduntur. Hanc in nobis rectitudinem causat in nobis formaliter gratia gratificans seu caritas infusa." CT, V, pp. 275-276. Pinarola, whose full name was Antonius Fresius de Pinarola, was a Franciscan Conventual, professor at Perugia.

Massarelli's comment on the various definitions of justification is accurate for the most part, though a bit oversimplified: "All agree in fact, disagree in words." [22a]

Actually the fathers did agree that justification is a dynamic change or process which God alone can initiate and which he does on account of the meritorius suffering and death of Christ. They all insisted that this change, for which God alone is the efficient cause, does produce a real effect in man. Man is truly justified.

The agreement is reflected in the final decree where Colossians 1, (12. 13) is quoted: "quo (Pater) dignos nos fecit in partem sortis sanctorum in lumine, et eripuit de potestate tenebrarum, transtulitque in regnum Filii dilectionis suae, in quo habemus redemptionem et remissionem peccatorum." These words of St. Paul suggest a description of the justification of the wicked as a pasage from that state in which man is born a son of the first Adam into the state of grace and of adoption of sons of God, through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Saviour.[23]

In chapter seven a definition of justification is given where not the process but the effects of justification are stressed: "It is not solely the remision of sins but also the sanctification and renovation of the interior man through the voluntary reception of grace and gifts. Hence man from unjust becomes just and from an enemy a friend that he may be an heir, according to the hope of eternal life." [24]

(b) *God alone justifies — in view of the passion and death of Christ*

Luther's charge [25] that the nominalist theology of his time was Pelagian, finds little substantiation at Trent. None of the

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[22a] "Omnes igitur theologi in re conveniunt, quamvis in verbis discrepent." CT, V, p. 279.

[23] The final form of the decree is contained in the fifth volume of the acts: pages 790 to 797. The passage cited is on page 792.

[24] *Ibid.*, Chap. 7, p. 793.

[25] "The absolute gratuitousness of justification was and always remained the basic concern of Luther's religion as it had been the content of his decisive religious experience. To this end he fought scholastic the-

fathers expressed opinions that could be called Pelagian or semi Pelagian. Indeed all of them explicitly affirmed that only God can justify man. Salmeron's statement is typical. God alone can forgive the infinite debt due to sin. God alone by his infinite power can elevate the creature to the high status of adopted sons. All this God does on account of Christ.[26] It would be superflous to quote additional writers since all the theologians and fathers were in such obvious accord on this point.[27]

The final decree in enumerating the causes of justification states that the efficient cause is "the merciful God who gratuitously washes us . . . The meritorious cause, his most beloved only begotten son, Our Lord Christ." [28]

(c) *Justification is completely gratuitous*

The theologians at Trent will differ as to the order and the meaning of the acts placed before justification. But all will agree that none of the acts prior to justification, whether acts of faith, fear, hope or sorrow, is capable of causing or compelling God to justify man. Justification is a gift of the supremely sovereign and free God, given to sinful man in view of Christ's sufferings, and death.

Consider a theologian like Castilloneus. Typical of many he describes the works preceding justification; he does not suggest, indeed he rejects the possibility that these works (placed under

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ology which he accused of having become tainted with Pelagianism." Jedin, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, p. 170.

[26] "Deus auctor est totius nostrae justificationis. Ideo a Paulo, Rom. 3(30), dicitur justificare, quia solus Deus potest dimittere peccata quae infinita debita sunt, quae nisi a Deo infinito, in quem commissa, condonari non possunt. . . . solus est infinitae potentiae, ut possit elevare creaturam in consortium suum et dare spiritum suum in medio nostro, . . . Et dicitur Deus justiifcare gratis et ob bonitatem et misericordiam suam nobis communicandam, et tamen non sine aliqua justitia non nostra, sed Christi, qui est agnus tollens peccata mundi, juge sacrificium, justitia nostra", CT. V, p. 793.

[27] CF. Summary of views of minor theologians, CT. V, p. 279, 80. Summary of views of Fathers: CT. V, p. 327-8.

[28] Final decree — Ch. VII CT, V, p. 793.

the influence of God's grace) in any active way produce justice. "Opera praecedentia disponunt, sequentia augent justitiam." [29]

Pinarola will say the same.[30] Only works *done in grace* such as a knowledge and hatred of sin, the resolution to confess, the confidence of attaining pardon thru Christ, *can dispose* man for justification. They do so dispose him. Pinarola can even say that these works are meritorius; *secundum quid.* Yet *grace* or inherent *justice* is *gratuitous.*[31] He will hold these two statements in tension as will many others.[32] How are we justified gratis? Because the dispositions placed by man in no strict and proper sense merit grace. This is true even of faith: As the final decree expresses this: "gratis autem justificari, ideo dicamur, quia nihil eorum, quae justificationem praecedunt, sive fides, sive opera, ipsam justificationis gratiam promeretur." [32a]

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[29] CT, V, p. 273.

[30] Later we will indicate the disagreement between theologians on this point.

[31] "Opera quaedam antecedunt justificationem, quaedam concomitantur, quaedam vero subsequuntur. Opera justificationem antecedentia sunt in duplici differentia. Quaedam enim sunt, quae terrore legis externo vel humano, terreno carnalique respectu fiunt. Quaedam vero sunt, quae instinctu, hortatu motioneque divina fiunt. Hac stante distinctione ponuntur hae propositiones. Prima talis est: Nulla opera sola virtute naturali producta, id est sine aliqua gratia naturalem voluntatem praeveniente, vel terrore legis aut humano respecto facta, ad justificationem faciunt meritore nec disponunt, ut congruenter donetur gratia gratificans. Quoniam ad hoc, quod ali quod opus sit dispositivum de congruo ad gratiam, necesse est quod in finem ultimum, qui Deus est, ordinetur; sed tale opus ab homine corrupto in Adam et in se ipsum recurvo fieri non potest sine special gratia Deo. Secunda propositio: Opera justiifcationem anticedentia, instinctu, hortatu motioneque divina a nobis facta, licet gratiae gratificantis et justificationis non sint condigna, disponunt tamen et animum praeparant ad gratiam recipiendam, quam Deus non ex operum dignitate donat, sed *gratis* et *misericorditer.*" CT, V, p. 276.

[32] According to the summary of the secretary Massarelli: "Et major pars theologorum dixit, quod opera disponentia ad justificationem sunt meritoria justiifcationis de congruo, opera vero post justificationem sunt meritoria vitae aeternae de condigna." CT, V, p. 280.

[32a] CT, V, p. 794.

(d) *Yet man can and must co-operate*

When we speak of man's co-operation we must remember that as De Vega said, God works two things in us without us — our call, the infusion of grace. If Luther meant only this by his statements that man is passive in the process of justification, there would be no quarrel with him.[32b]

Salmeron says that God could treat us as infants but it would not be fitting. We are not plants or brutes but creatures of reason and free will. True, God takes the initiative with gratia praeveniens et stimulans. But we can and must co-operate by *consenting* to the justifying action of God.[33]

For Pinarola, free will is active and operating in the dispositions whereby man is prepared for receiving the great gift of justice.[34]

The Bishop of Fano expresses man's role in justification with a formula that obviously owes its origin to St. Thomas. "When we are justified we consent to the justice of God." [35]

The near unanimity of opinion on the need for man's co-operation is evidenced by the reaction to the statements of four theologians who seemed to deny the possibility and need for man to co-operate in the justifying process. The four were 2 Augustinians, Gregory and Aurelius of Rocca Contrata, plus the Do-

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[32b] "Ex parte Deo requiruntur duo: primum disponere, et in hoc nos concurrimus active, si volumus vel nolumus. Secundum est infundere, quod est Dei, et nos operamur passive." CT, V, p. 275.

[33] "Quamvis enim Deus possit hoc justitiae donum nobis infundere, nihil nobis operantibus, ut in pueris facit, non tamen vult ob decentiam. Operatur enim nobiscum non ut cum plantis aut saxis ratione carentibus, sed ut cum hominibus rationis ac liberi arbitrii usum habentibus. ... Ecce ergo quod operatur Deus, quod nos. Ille enim solus inspirat et movet et infundit dona; nos autem concurrimus ad recipiendum dona active et cooperamur, cum Deo in usu donorum, ita quod totum credere nostrum est, totum etiam est Dei; nostrum operari Dei est totum *et* totum nostri ..." CT, V, p. 268.

[34] "Si de operibus justificationem concomitantibus loquamur, quae sunt motus liberi arbitrii per fidem in Deum et in detestationem peccati propter Deum super omnia amatum ..." CT, V, p. 276.

[35] "Dum justificamur, justitiae Dei consentimus." CT, V, p. 310. CF. Summa Theologica 1, 2, 9; 112 art. 2 q. 113 art. 3 .

minican, Gregory of Sienna and Lawrence, a Servite. According to Massarelli, "dixerunt quod liberum arbitrium se habet mere passive et nullo pacto active ad justificationem." Massarelli records the complete rejection of the opinion of these four, "qui non videntur satis catholice locuti." [36]

Despite some earnest and heated discussion on certain points that we will encounter later, the fathers were in accord regarding the dispositions which precede justification. Mention was usually made of faith, fear, penance, hope, acts of love and obedience, and the resolve to receive baptism. All of these dispositions are various manifestations of man's co-operation with and consent to the justifying action of God.

Again returning to Salmeron we find him speaking of "gratia proeveniens and stimulans" which arouses faith, fear, penance (hatred of sin is his meaning) and the resolution of leading a new life; also under the impetus of divine grace the soul produces acts of hope, of certain love and obedience together with the resolution to submit to baptism or penance.[37]

Pinarola, considering an adult infidel who seeks to obtain justice, makes almost the same enumeration. Such a man must respond freely to God's initiative by an act of faith in the truths God reveals to him. He must manifest displeasure and sorrow for sin and join to this the reception of or the vow to receive baptism.[38]

Bishop Ausculanos summarized the dispositions in the following manner: The adult infidel must 1) credere articulis fidei 2) abrenuntiare pecatis 3) promptitudo ad observantiam mandatorum Dei.[39] These dispositions render a man disposed for

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[36] CT, V, p. 280.

[37] Salmeron sees man must prepare himself in the following way: "Pulsat ergo gratia illa praeveniens et stimulans, quae non est aliud quam motio quaedam et impulsus divinus excitans intellectum et affectum. Primum ergo, ad quod excitat, est fides, id est motio mentis in Deum. [Then follow] ... Timor Dei ... poenitentia, odium peccatorum, propositum vitandi illa ... actus spei seu fiduciae cuiusdam ... actus amoris cujusdam et propositum parendi illi et servandi ejus legem et praeceptum speciale de baptismo in primo accessu infidelis ad Christum." CT, V, p. 268.

[38] See note 34.

[39] Philos Roverella, Bishop of Ascole. "... primum est credere articulis

baptism. The final formula, accepted by the council merely makes explicit all that is implicitly contained in Ausculanos formula.[40]

(e) *Faith plays a special role*

Two of the outstanding theologians at the council were the Spaniards, Andreas De Vega and Dominico Soto. Both wrote commentaries on the final decree and both are necessary for any worth while attempt to understand what the fathers at Trent were seeking to accomplish. According to De Vega one of the principal concerns of the fathers was to teach the special role that faith plays in the process of justification.[41]

The third question placed before the fathers on June 22 was "how must one understand the phrase, man is justified by faith?" [42] The fathers were aware of the special role that St. Paul gives to faith. They realised that Luther stresed the role of faith to the point of excluding other dispositions, indeed any human activity from the process of justification.[43] In seeking to place faith in its proper perspecitve, there were bound to be important disagreements. At the same time there was a great measure of spontaneous agreement among the council's members. Though they might disagree on the *nature* of justifying faith, they were in general agreement with Salmeron's effort to give faith a pre-eminent role in justification:

a) justification is attributed principally to faith because it is the *first* of the dispositions through which we are elevated above the vileness of nature; b) it is *always* necessary while some of the others are not, (penance for example) c) all of the other dispositions *proceed* from it, thus faith arouses sorrow, fear and hope.

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fidei, secundum abrenuntiare peccatis, quod est poenitentia, tertium promptitudo ad observantiam mandatorum Dei." CT, V, p. 294.

[40] See final decree CT, V, p. 793 chap. 6 — or Denz. 798.

[41] A. De Vega, *De Justificatione,* (Venice: 1547) p. 7.

[42] CF. supra.

[43] Both Soto and De Vega mention this. For example see Soto *De Natura et Gratia.* I p. 92, and De Vega, *De Justificatione*: [Luther teaches] ... nisi solam fidem & eam sufficere ad acquirendam justitiam ..." p. 6.

For Salmeron faith plays a role before justification like that of charity following justification.[44]

Pacensis said that Paul attributes justification to faith, not that it alone suffices, but because it is the *first root* and origin of our justification.[45] "Fundamentum totius nostrae justitiae."

According to the final decree, what does St. Paul mean when he writes (Rom. 3, 22) that man is justified by faith alone? He means what the Church has always understood him to mean: "Fides est humanae salutis *initium, Fundamentum* et radix omnis justificationis, sine qua impossibile est placere Deo." [46]

## Disputed Questions

The work of preparing the final decree lasted from June until January. There was general agreement that certain basic teachings of the Reformers could not be accepted when measured against the Church's own awareness (Glaubensbewusstsein) of the deposit of faith. As we have noted, certain basic articles of true doctrine were unanimously agreed upon.[47] But in attempting to determine with more precision, the meaning of the complex reality that is justification, the theologians and Fathers were in constant disagreement in so far as their background was Thomist, Scotist or Augustinian.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss the "quaestiones disputatae" raised at Trent in any complete or ade-

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[44] [Justification is ascribed principally to faith] "Primo quia est prima, per quam elevamur a vilitate naturae. Secundo quia est semper necessaria; ... tertio. Quia omnes aliae praeparationes prodeunt ab illa motu fidei, et fides excitate dolorem, timorem, spem. Sicut ergo in justificato, quia omnia quae facit, prodeut a caritate placent Deo, ita in via ad justificationem quaecunque Deo placent ut justificent, produent a fide." CT, V, p. 270.

[45] Pacencis — Franciscus Navarra, a Spanish Augustinian who was Bishop of Badajoz ... "[Faith] est enim fundamentum totius nostrae justitiae ..." CT, V, p. 324.

[46] "Ut scilicet per fidem ideo justificari dicamur, quia fides est humanae salutis initium, fundamentum et radix omnis justificationis, sine qua *impossible est placere* Deo." CT, V, p. 794.

[47] CF. Supra.

quate fashion. This would necessitate a thesis of enormous length. It would also be irrelevant to our purpose which is to initiate a dialogue between Trent and Niebuhr. Obviously a dialogue must centre on points that the partners find of mutual interest and mutual concern. Niebuhr shows neither interest nor concern for the problems (with one exception) that were so vigorously debated at Trent. For these reasons it seems sensible to merely indicate the points on which the theologians at Trent coluld not agree and to cite the pertinent literature. As debate continued and disagreement only deepened, concern for the needs of the faithful and common sense dictated only one solution: The "quaestiones disputatoe" were left unresolved.

(a) *Does man merit de congruo, co-operating with the initial grace of God, the grace of justification?*

All who spoke on this question agreed that man can not merit in any proper sense (merit de condigno) the grace of justification.[48] But while ruling out merit de condigno many were convinced that the adult, co-operating with the light and impetus given by God, can in some way merit the gift of justice. This was known in the schools as merit de congruo.[49] It could be called merit only by analogy. It was based on the fact that it was fitting or proper to God's mercy and liberality that He bestow the gift of justice on a sinner who under the impulse of divine grace freely placed the various acts such as faith and fear that dispose him for this surpossing gift. Those who defend this position were generally Franciscans trained in the theology of Duns Scotus.[50] Opposing them were the Dominicans or men such

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[48] For a brief explanation of the various kinds of merit, see Flick, *De Gratia*, p. 510, or Baumgartner, *La Grace du Christ*, p. 117-118, 206 ff., and Rivière, art. "Merite", DTC, 10, 686.

[49] CF. Landgraf, A.M. — *Dogmengeschichte der Früh* scholastik, I, 2, p. 75-110.

[50] Scotus clearly taught meritum de congruo for the works done in grace preceding justification ... "Dispositiones ad gratiam habent rationem meriti de Congruo." IV Sent. I, II, dist. VII, q. 11. See Pinarola's statement — "Hanc operum dispositionem et praeparationem, cui ex justitia non est debita gratia, theologi vocant meritum de congruo, quod non est

as Salmeron who followed St. Thomas on this point.[51]

Although the majority favoured the concept of merit de congruo,[52] while it was vigorously defended during the entire seven months of discussion, the final decree simply states: "gratis autem justificari ideo dicamur, quia nihil corum, quae justificationem praecedunt, sive fides, sive opera, ipsam justificationis gratiam *promeretur.*" [53] From the acts and from the express intention of the Fathers it is clear that the merit excluded is merit de condigno. Merit de congruo was neither accepted nor rejected by the Council.[54] The question remains open.

(b) Another disputed point at the Council was the answer to the question placed before the minor theologians at the opening congregation: Quomodo intelligendum sit "justificari hominem per fidem?"

All concerned were convinced that Luther's understanding of faith was unacceptable. For faith is more than "fides fiducialis." And faith can not exclude other dispositions which

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vere et simplex meritum, sed meritum secundum quid." CT, V, p. 276. Massarelli writes in his summary of the statement of the minor theologians given in the first six congregations: "Et major pars theologorum dixit, quod opera disponentia ad justificationem sunt meritoria justificationis de congruo, opera vero post justificationem sunt meritoria vitae aeternae de condigno." CT, V, p. 280. The Papal Commissary, Sanfelice, also approves merit de congruo for the works done in grace, which lead to justification: "...opera, quae ex acceptatione divina sint congruenter meritoria..." CT, V, p. 292.

[51] St. Thomas seems to reject any notion of merit de congruo as proper to the works that precede justification. In the sentences, d. 27, q. 1, Q. 4, ad. 4 — St. Thomas admits a certain merit de congruo "...Deus dat gratiam indignis quia (dat) his qui non sunt sufficienter ad hoc digni, sed tamen habent aliquam dispositionem ad recipiendum, ex quo dicuntur quodammodo ex congruo gratiam mereri." But in the Summa, when treating of the imperfect preparation for justification, he makes no more mention of merit de congruo. CF. la Ilae, q. 112, a. 2 and 3. See Soto D. *De Natura et Gratia,* Book II chap. III, p. 93. "quod ante justificationem, quae fit per gratiam gratum facientem, nihil humanis operibus insit meriti, sive condigni, sive congrui."

[52] According to Massarelli, see note 50.

[53] CT, V, p. 793.

[54] *ibid.*

prepare a sinner for the gift of justice and which Scripture expressly mentions. Moreover faith involves man's *free* co-operation. Nor are faith and justice synonyms as certain statements of Luther suggest. Yet faith has a predominant role among the dispositions. How does one describe this role? When St. Paul, in Romans and Galatians, says that man is justified by faith, is he referring to the act of faith placed under the impulse of gratia excitans et adjuvans, an act which precedes in time the actual infusion of justice and the habit of faith? Or is Paul referring to fides formata, a faith which is part of the proximate disposition for justice and actually belongs to the very substance of justification.[55]

Consider the opinion of Soto:[56] St. Paul, speaking of the man who is justified by faith, referring to justice as from first to last a matter of faith, clearly means first justification. And the faith mentioned in Romans 3:28 is living faith. How then is this living faith related to justification? According to Soto, faith together with hope and charity is the source or principle of acts which dispose a man for justification. These acts must proceed from the infused virtues. They occur at the same moment as the infusion of justice. Why and how does one precede the other? God, at the same moment in time, infuses grace and moves and prepares the will for accepting it by infusing faith, hope and charity and moving man to place acts of living faith which acts are the proximate disposition for justice. Infused justice and the act of living faith are related to one another by mutual causality. The movement of free will, an act of faith ordered by charity, belongs to the genus of material cause and in this order procedes the introduction of the form. Grace or inherent justice exercises a formal and efficient causality and as such precede the movement of free will.[57]

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[55] For the most adequate treatment of this problem, see E. Stakemeier, *Glaube und Rechtfertigung.*

[56] Soto. *Natura et Gratia,* p. 74 ff.

[57] Among the Fathers who shared Soto's opinion were: *a*) the Bishop of Fano, who clearly considers justifying faith to refer to the infused habit of faith: "Haec fides, quae nos justificat, habet annexam caritatem; igiter non est mortua, ut Jacobus (2, 26) ait. Ergo non solo fide, sed fide

Those who follow Scotus on this point, as do Salmeron and Pinarola will say that Paul is talking in Romans of an act of faith which as a disposition for justice, precedes in time the infusion of justice and the habit of living faith. This act of faith is placed under the influence of a special help of God and some motion of love which is not the love of charity. This act of faith (Salmeron calls it semi-viva) is par excellence the disposition for justification. Others saw it as the source and beginning of our justification.[58]

The discussion over the nature of justifying faith, whether it is an act or an act proceeding from a habit, whether it precedes in time the infusion of justice or is simultaneous, lasted up till the end of December. Finally it was suggested by the presiding officer, Cardinal Cervini that the faith St. Paul talks of refers to *every* justification and we are as Paul says justified by faith. "Quia fides est humanae salutis initium, fundamentum et radix omnis justificationis. Nam sine fide impossible est placere Deo et ad filorum Dei consortium pervenire." [59]

Cervini asked if this formula was acceptable. It was pleasing to the majority present.

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viva et armata caritate, id est operibus, justificamur." CT, V, p. 310. *b*) the Dominican, Gregory of Sienna whom Massarelli quotes as saying the following: "Justificari per fidem: non quod fides praecedat, sed post quam justificamur, credimus; ideo fides non praecedit ad justificationem, ex doctrina B. Thomae." CT, V, p. 275. *c*) Angelus Paschalis, Dominican Bishop of Motula who says the following: "Quod requiratur ad justicationem impii secundo ... motus liberi arbitrii in Deum qui est per fidem formatam. ..." CT, V, p. 303.

[58] The Irishman, Robert Wauchape, Archbishop of Armagh was one of the most respected theologians and one of the most interesting personalities present at the Council. He was clearly in favour of the Scotistic opinion: "Paulus non intelligit de viva fide et infusa, sed de informi, quae est primum in impio. Dicimur igitur fide justificari, quia fides est prima in dispositione et ejus quas fundamentum et humanae saluts exordium. ..." CT, V, p. 724. The Congregation of prelates who met on December 17th mostly expressed an opinion similar to that of the Archbishop of Armagh. See CT, V, p. 724.

[59] CT, V, p. 733.

(c) *Certitude of Faith*[60]

This question involved long and intense discussion. It seemed to generate more heat than light. For the two parties involved (Thomists and Scotists) it provided an occasion to re-examine their own tradition but it produced little in the way of clarification or precision of the doctrine of justification. And the controversy seems to have been a classic example of how opponents can talk past one another. For Luther, the basic terms grace and certitude of faith, did not mean what the Fathers at Trent assumed they meant.[61]

The second question presented to the theologians on October 15 was "Is it possible, in view of one's actual justice, to have a certitude of being in a state of grace? And what kind of certitude?" [62]

Briefly stated, the Thomists position was that apart from private revelation, man could not be certain (in the rigorous proper sense) of being in the state of grace. Man could have at best certain signs such as a horror of evil, a desire to do God's will, devotion to the Virgin Mary, which might give a kind of moral certitude that he was in the Friendship of God but man could not have certitude of faith (cui non potest subesse falsum) regarding his state of soul.

The Scotists position was based on the "sacramental argument." The sacraments are objective infallible sources of divine grace. Man receiving them can be certain of their effects as long as he places no obstacle such as serious sin to impede their effect. Therefore man can possess a certitude of faith that he is in the state of grace.

The Thomists objected on just this point. Can man have certitude when he approaches the sacraments that he has placed no obstacle to their fruitful reception? The discussion dragged

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[60] For the discussion at Trent, see CT, V, p. 523-770, also H. Jedin, *History of the Council of T.* Vol. II, p. 212. Above all, St. Pfürtner, *Luther and Aquinas on Salvation*, p. 119 ff.

[61] S. Pfürtner, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

[62] CT, V, p. 523.

on for weeks up to the final days of the sixth session. Chief reason for the drawn out and fruitless discussion was the fact that each party continued to misunderstand the position of the other. The certitude of faith which the Thomists' rejected was not what the Scotists intended. The certainty man could have that he was placing no obstacle to the reception of the sacraments (defended by the Scotists) was for all practical purposes identical with the moral certainty admitted by their opponents.

Wisely it was decided to condemn only the Lutheran notion of certitude of salvation.

## Two-fold Justice

Seeking to delay the approval of the decree on justification the Papal Legates suggested on October 15 that the theologians and prelates consider two questions.

(1) "Has the justified, who has performed good works in a state of grace and with the help of actual grace — both of which stem from the merits of Christ — and who has thus preserved inherent justice, so completely met the claims of divine justice that when he appears before the judgement seat of Christ he obtains eternal life on account of his own merits? Or is he in need, in addition to his own inherent justice, of the mercy and justice of Christ, that is, of the merits of His Passion, in order to supplement what is wanting to his own personal justice? And this in such a way that this justice is imparted to him in the measure of his faith and charity?"

(2) "Is it possible, in view of one's actual justice, to have a certitude of being in a state of grace? And what kind of certitude?" [63]

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[63] The questions presented to the theologians on October 15th:

(i) "Utrum justificatus, qui operatus est opera bona ex gratia et auxilio divino, a meritis D.N. Jesu Christi profecto, ita ut retinuerit inhaerentem justitiam, praesentans se cum illa ante tribunal Christi, censendus sit satisfecisse divinae justitiae ad meritum et acquisitionem vitae aeternae; an vero cum hac inhaerente justitia opus insuper habeat miseri-

We have noted already the Council's treatment of the second question. The first was considered of far greater importance.

A student perusing the acts of the Council for the first time, recalling that the Council was summoned to consider the teachings of the reformers, may at first be surprised and irritated at the long discussion over the question of twofold justice. What does this have to do with the doctrine of Luther? Would it not have been more profitable to discuss and seek to understand certain formulas of Luther? But then one comes to realise that the controversy over twofold justice is not a detour from the main business of the Council. In fact it goes to the very centre of the disagreement between Catholics and Protestants: How is the justified sinner related to Christ his redeemer?

Some grasp of the meaning of the discussions on two fold justice is important, in discussions with Niebuhr. We have seen some of Niebuhr's objections to the council of Trent's teaching on justification. Could Niebuhr maintain that the Catholic Church does not take seriously the persistence of sin in the life of the redeemed if he considered what was involved in the discussions on a two fold justice?

For Seripando did take seriously the fact that the justified remain sinners. He was as concerned as Niebuhr to foster humility and avoid self righteousness in the redeemed. Considering the sinfulness of the works of those in justice, mindful of the rigorous judgement of God, Seripando insisted that inherent justice alone is insufficient to save man. The Justice of Christ must *supply* for the *defects* of *man's inherent justice* else at the end of his life he could be condemned.[64]

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cordia et justitia Christi, hoc est merito passionis ejus, quo suppleantur defectus suae justitiae, quae justitia communicetur ex divina dispensatione secundum mensuram fidei et caritatis."

(ii) "Utrum aliquis possit esse certus de sua adepta gratia secundum praesentem justitiam, et quo genere certitudinis." CT, V, p. 523.

[64] While Seripando's opponent asserted that he meant that justitia inhaerens, or sanctifying grace is defective and must be supplemented, it is clear from his own statements that it is not inherent justice but the works flowing from it which are defective and must be supplemented by the justice of Christ when at the particular judgement they are subject to a rigorous divine judgement: "... justitiam operum nostrorum, divino

We must consider the elements that make Seripando's doctrine of two fold justice intelligible. Three important elements were his doctrine of concupisence, his doctrine of merit and his understanding of the term "justitia inhaerens."

(a) *Concupisence*

Seripando was convinced that concupiscence is not some morally indifferent power of man's affective nature.[65] It is also more than just a punishment for sin or a source of sin.[66] No its involuntary movements bring man into a certain contradiction with the holiness of God. If God hates sin he must hate concupiscence from which sin continually arises. Seripando objected to the expression. Nothing remains of sin in the baptized which God hates.[67] This statement must be qualified. Although no evil remains in the reborn which God hates, "magna remanet infirmitas, quae tamquam Deo displicens" . . .[68]

When one speaks of penalties of O.S. it is necessary to distinguish. Some penalties such as mortality have no aspect of sin. This is not true of concupisence: "concupiscentia, quae ita est poena, ut aliquam etiam habeat peccati rationem."[69] On June 5 Seripando said that preachers should not be prohibited

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judicio examinatam, inveniri posse defectuosam et egere misericordia Dei." CT, XII, p. 671.

[65] "Cum iis, qui adeo ab hac sancti Spiritus doctrina sunt alieni, ut non intelligant, concupiscentiam non esse vim naturalem, eam scilicet, que cum irascibili in appetito sensitivo a philosophie ponitur, sed totius hominis inordinationem seu, ut Augustinus loquitur, violentam carnis illecebram contra domnatum ments ex peccato Ade ortam et in posteritatem omnem derivatam, nihil est quod loquamur quoniam in principiis dissentimus." CT, XII, p. 551.

[66] See note 5, below.

[67] Commenting on the proposed decree on Original Sin, Seripando is quoted as saying: "Verba in *illis enim nihil odit Deus*: ex concupiscentia oritur peccatum; peccatum odit Deus, ergo et concupiscentiam. A qua peccatum descendit ergo aliquod remanet in baptisatis, quod odit Deus." CT, V, p. 203.

[68] CT, XII, p. 552, 34 ff.

[69] CT, XII, p. 550.

from calling concupisence sin, even in the baptised, so long as they explain the expression in the meaning of St. Augustine.[70]

It seems clear that for Seripando, we can not be faithful to St. Augustine or the realities of moral experience unless we admit that even in the baptized, concupisence is in some sense sin. But in what sense. He lists 4 ways in explaining in what sense concupisence can be called sin: 1) quia peccato facta est ... 2) quia, si vincit peccato causa est ... 3) quia est poena peccato ... 4) quia in causa est, ut legem et bonum perfecte, non impleamus.[71]

This fourth reason seems to be the most important for Seripando. Concupisence *is sin* because it is the source of so many disorders such as self love, and negligence which prevent man from fulfilling perfectly the law of Christ. "Dum caritas, principium totius boni, impugnatur a concupiscentia, fit ut operibus bonis admisceatur *amor proprius,* nec fiant cum ea puritate, perfectione et pura intentione sicut oporteret, ideoque habent inse aliquid impurum et imperfectum, licet hoc non imputetur in peccatum, sicut nec concupiscentia, ex qua nascitur talis imperfectio, quae illis in peccatum imputatur, qui non per fidem uniuntur cun Christo benedicto." [72] Hence all our justices are "velut pannus menstruatae." (IS. 6, 46). Concupiscence is not sin however in the full and proper meaning of the word. Luther had said that to deny that the concupisence remaining in the baptized was sin was to trample on Paul and Christ. Leo V in the Bull Exsurge expressly condemned this statement extracted from the writings of Luther.[73] Seripando does not fall under this condemnation of Luther. Because, while concupiscence is truly sin in the unbaptized, in the reborn it is not sin because a) the motions arising apart from sin are not imputed as sin in

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[70] "Remanet post baptismus concupiscentia, de qua non sunt prohibendi concionatores, quod eam peccatum vocent, declarantes tamen, qualiter dicatur peccatum videl. cum ei obedimus, ut Paulus appellat et div Augustinus." CT, V, pp. 194-195.

[71] CT, XII, 544, 40, 545.

[72] CT, XII, p. 844.

[73] Denz. 1452.

the justified — and this on account of Christ[74] b) moreover the reborn have the power (derived from Christ) to deny consent in such a way that sin does not rule in them and does not have the whole and full reason of sin.[75] Yet it is sin, in some sense because it opposes the law of God which prohibits not only consent but even the very movements of concupiscence.[76]

Why does God allow this powerful force to remain in man after baptism? To serve as an incentive to humility since man is ever aware of his dependence on God's continual influence for preserving justice; to hinder self righteousness since man in the constant struggle will be wounded and must confess that he remains a sinner.[77]

For Seripando then, one must be true to the facts of moral experience and admit that owing to concupiscence and self love

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[74] "At non sic dici de concupiscentia potest, quae nullo pacto est mutata in renatis, sed eundem habet in eis et in non renatis actum qui tantum eis non imputatur." CT, XII, p. 553.

[75] "Non autem (concupiscentia) regnat, cum desideriis ejus, id est, his, quae secundum carnem contra spiritum concupiscuntur, non obeditur." *Ibid.* 544.

[76] Seripando quotes with approval Augustine's statement: "Preterea, quomodo aperte dicit, eam non solum esse causam et poenam peccati sed etiam peccatum. Inquit enim: Sicut cecitas cordis, quam solus removet illuminator Deus, et peccatum est, quo in Deum non creditur, et poena peccati, qua cor superbum digna animadversione punitur, et causa peccati, cum mali aliquid ceci cordis errore committitur, ita concupiscentia carnis, adversus quam bonus concupiscit spiritus, et peccatum est, quia inest illi inobedientia contra dominatum mentis, et poena peccati est, quia reddita est meritis inoboedientis, et causa peccati est defectione consentientis vel contagione nascentis." CT, XII, p. 546.

[77] "Relinquitur, ut homo semper cogitet, qualis ex se sit et qualis Dei gratia per Jesum Christum. Ex se ad omne malum pronus. Que pronitas nisi remaneret in homine, homo ex se et in se justum esse putaret. Dei autem gratia malum illud habet, ad damnationem non imputatum propter Christum; eadem quoque gratia fit, ut non regnet per consensum neque membris uti possit tanquam armis ad iniquitatem. Et certe, nisi hec infirmatas in homine maneret, nullum haberet Christi gratia sensum. Hec quoque facit infirmitas, ut homo nihil in se collocet spei seque totum Christo committat et semper adversus hunc domesticum hostem divinum imploret adjutorium et divini spiritus auxilio ad carnem, in qua tanta est infirmitas, mortificandam incumbat." CT, XII, pp. 552-553.

even the just man's works are defective and in some sense displeasing to God.

(b) *Merit*

Seripando is faced with obvious difficulty when dealing with merit. He wants to affirm in the strongest way possible that both inherent justice and glory are gifts of an all merciful God.[78] Yet the scripture speaks of eternal life as a reward for the good works of the justified. His own words reveal the difficulty. "Magna hoc loco consurgit dubitatio: an opera, per quae ducimur in vitam aeternam, merita dici possint? Dico quod sicut vita aeterna merces dicitur in sacris litteris et gratia, sic opera dici possunt merita, sed debent etiam dici dona, velut August. (epist. 106) merita gratuita." [79]

Seripando is concerned to be faithful to scripture and tradition and so he states that eternal life is or can be called "merces". And works can be called meritorious. But the discussions reveal that for him works done by man do not have strict title to reward. 1) Not only is there an obvious *inequality* between works and reward — et. life 2) But recalling the defective nature of these works 3) And the rigorous exacting justice of God — we conclude that man possessing inherent justice, standing before God's divine tribunal, could still be condemned, unless he appealed over and beyond justice, to the mercy of God in Christ.[80]

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[78] "Dico: Gloriae et vitae aeternae consecutio referenda primum est in Dei caritatem seu misericordiam, qua renatos adoptavit in filios."

[79] *Ibid.*

[80] (i) This was common doctrine in the schools.

(ii) "... quia opera talia forte non fiunt cum ea puritate, quae Deo debetur et quam Dei gratia juvante praestare possemus, praesertim si considerentur omnes ejus circumstantiae. ..."

(iii) "Primo, quia S. Thomas ait: "Duplex est justitia, una juxta humanum judicium, altera juxta divinum, quae quantum differant, Deus ipse expressit dicens: *Nec Juxta intuitum* hominis *ego Judico.* Homo enim videt quae apparent, Deus autem intuetur cor." CT, V, p. 669.

(iv) See note 64 above.

(c) *Inherent justice*

The chief point of controversy between Seripando and the majority of theologians is how is the justice of Christ related to the "justia inhaerens" of the justified sinner.

In justification God takes the initiative and has mercy on the sinner, arousing him to acts which dispose him to receive justice.[81] An act of faith is the most important disposition.[82] Then God imputes to the sinner the justice of Christ. This produces the first aspect of justification: forgiveness of sins. Seripando calls it "justificatio fidei."[83] Then God infuses charity in the heart of the believer which means that man now has inherent justice and produces works of righteousness which are meritorious. This moment in the process is "justificatio operum."[84]

But at the same time the justified sinner must realise that through the whole of his life the justice of Christ is present to him. The just man must look to and hope for and depend on the justice of Christ rather than his own works which although just and meritorious remain defective and inadequate.

At the moment of death the just man turns again to the justice of Christ which fulfills his own defects and enables him to appear before the divine tribunal.

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[81] "Ad hanc justificationem requiritur primo gratia Dei...." CT, XII, p. 333.

[82] "Fides, qua justitia Dei nobis communicatur, applicatur, conjungitur." CT, XII, p. 620. "Dico: ex gratia et misericordia Dei movente eum ad paenitentiam, et fide, qua meritum Christi seu justitia Dei applicatur seu communicatur." CT, XII, p. 629.

[83] "Dico, ut dixi de justificatione loquens, quod justificatio fidei nunquam est nec esse potest sine justificatione caritatis. Alter tamen est justificationis fidei effectus, alter caritatis, quorum primus etsi non re, secundum tamen nostrum modum intelligendi effectum charitatis precedit. Effectus justificationis fidei est remissio peccatorum." CT, XII, p. 630.

[84] "Effectus justificationis charitatis est juste vivere." Ibid. "Habet justificationis vocabulum aliam quandam vim seu potestatem, que respicit justitiam operum, qua is justificatus dicitur, qui juste vivit." CT, XII, p. 621.

## Contrary Arguments

The arguments continued for many weeks. Among those who spoke and whose speeches were recorded only 3 gave continued support to Seripando. The others rejected entirely the theory of two fold justice as it came to be called. The most complete and telling argument was that of Laynez who spoke to the congregation of minor theologians on October 26. Laynez did not deny the imperfection of man's justice or the works flowing from it. Nor did he disregard the power of concupiscence, and self love, but rather the conclusions which the defenders of the doctrine drew from these facts of moral experience.[85]

Many of Laynez arguments against the doctrine of Seripando were anticipated by others. In fact long before Laynez arose to speak it was clear that Seripando had failed to win the support that he needed.[86]

Some of the opponents of Seripando used arguments that were extrinsic, yet devastating. Thomasinus wanted to know why the double justice doctrine is not found in any of the writings of the doctors nor in sacred Scripture. Could the doctrine, if true, have remained so long concealed?[87] Others also marvelled

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[85] "Ad hunc ergo modum intellecta quaestione ad eam responderem, quod ob defectus justitiae inhaerentis non opus est ante tribunal aliqua nova misericordia vel justitiae Christi nova imputatione, sed ut dictum est, tunc nobis applicari justitiae Christi fructum per modum meriti et retributionis et non imputationis, quae solum locum in justificatione impii vel peccatoris habet, quod variis viis probatur. Primo quidem, quia cum defectus opponatur perfectioni sev integritati, et duplex inveniatur perfectio, altera viae ad caelum, de qua Paulus, Ph. 1.3(15). Quicumque ergo perfecti sumus, hoc sentiamus, altera vero patriae [...] tenentes hanc positionem non possunt statuere imputationem illam novam ob defectum perfectionis, quam in patria speramus. Licet enim anima cujusvis sancti ante tribunal Christi praesentata et nondum beata deficit a perfectione, quam glorificata habebit, quia cognoscet et amabit: tamen iste defectus non sibi imputatur, quia non potest nec debet illo carere, quo se careret non esset iam in via, sed in termino." Laynez, CT, V, p. 614.

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 257.

[87] "Quod (the doctrine of twofold justice) non reperitur in doctore ullo et in sacris litteris non est, non est neque ponendum neque imaginandum."

at its novelty [88] and it was suggested that it had Luther for its author.[89]

Miranda [90] rejecting the doctrine for intrinsic reasons asked the question which was the most basic of all. How is the justice of Christ related to our justice? His answer was oft repeated. As the branch to the vine, as a river to its source, as the light of the air to the light of the sun. As air, although illuminated by the sun is not formally illumined by the sun's light but through light existing in it, caused by the light of the sun, so we are justified by Christ, the sun of justice, effective, meritorie, non formaliter, but by participating in the justice of Christ. We depend on Christ's justice in fieri et conservari. If it should be absent or fail, there would be no justice in us.

For Miranda, the just man appearing before the tribunal of Christ is already a certain image of Jesus Christ and so in appearing before Christ's tribunal, presenting one (his own) justice he presents both: "unam qua formaliter alteram qua effective et meritorie." [91]

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CT, V, p. 564. Thomasinus was a Florentine convenual, one of the theologians at the Council.

[88] For example. The French O.F.M. Jean du Conseil, a member of the Sorbonne and one of the best Franciscan theologians wrote: "... quod modus ille loquendi de Christi meriti applicatione novus est, et Paulus jubet, ut profanas vocum novitates devitemus." CT, V, p. 542.

[89] Thus Laynez: "... quod ultra novitatem propositionis et ignobilitatem auctoris, primi, qui fuit Lutherus, ut alii notarunt." CT, V, p. 617.

[90] The Dominican Bartolomeo de Miranda, better known as Carranza was later to become Archbishop of Toledo. In a votum delivered on 18th October, 1546, he wrote the following: "Istae duae justitiae si invicem conferantur, habet se haec nostra ad illam (quae Christi est) sicut palmes ad vitem, sicut rivulus ad fontem, a quo emanat et sicut lumen aeris ad lumen solis ... sicut aer quamvis illuminatur a sole, non tamen lucidus est formaliter per lumen solis, sed per lumen in eo existens causatum a lumine solis, sic et nos justificamur a Christo, effective et meritorie, et tamen non sumus justi formaliter per justitiam, quae in Christo est, sed per Christum participavimus et quae perpetuo pendet ab illo et a justitia illius in fieri et conservari." "Sicut lumen aeris a lumine solis, ita ut si contingeret aliquo casu, illam abesse et deficere, nullam nos possemus allegare justitiam in nobis...." CT, V, p. 550.

[91] "Justum virum esse imaginem quamdam Jesu Christi. Ideo cum

There is no need for a new application of justice for supplying defects contracted in this life.

For defects that arise during to the body will be overcome only at the resurrection.

For defects of the soul, if they are of fault, no one can appear with defects of fault before God's tribunal — unless the faults are venial.

If the defects are of penalty, purgatory is the place for these defects to be overcome.[92]

Oleastro reminded the Fathers in his votum that the just man appearing before the tribunal of God, has the Holy Spirit and the works he performed in this life were done under the influence or impulse of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit moves him to place works meritorious of eternal life, then these works must merit eternal life. Else the Holy Spirit acts in vain. [93]

Conseil had already argued in this fashion. Perhaps the works of the just are not "summe perfecta, non tamen habent in se defectum culpabilem, cum sint legi Dei conformia, ex gratia et motione Spiritus Sancti facta et sanquine Christo, jamdudum aspersa." [94]

Laynez votum was the most complete and effective argument. It took several hours to deliver and was followed with great

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sistitur ante tribunal Christi, praesentando unam qua formaliter alteram qua effective et meritorie." CT, V, p. 551.

[92] "... diversus esse defectus: quidam ad corpus pertinentes, et iste defectus non corrigentur, donec in ressurrectione resumamus corpora. ... Alii defectus sunt ad animam pertinentes, et isti sunt defectus culpae vel poenae. Cum defectu culpae non contingit justum decedere; alioqui non moreratur justus. Defectus vero poenae. ... Isti defectus non supplentur per imputatam justitiam Christi, sed ad eos delendos est destinatus locus purgatorius." CT, V, p. 551.

[93] Oleastro was a Dominican who represented the King of Portugal at the Council: "... homo justificatus cum sua justitia inhaerente praesentans se ante tribunal Dei praeopera justorum facta in caritate non tantum dicuntur sua sed Spiritus Sancti, juxta Paulum: (2 Tim. 4, 7 e 8). Qui spiritu Dei aguntur, filii Dei sunt. ... item si Spiritus movet justificatum ad bona opera, quae sint meritoria vitae aeternae, ita oportet esse, ut sint meritoria, alias Spiritus Sanctus frustraretur." CT, V, p. 546.

[94] CT, V, p. 541.

attention. Nearly all were enthusiastic in praising the cogency and completeness of his reasoning.[95]

Certainly the perfection of this life is defective in comparison with the next, because one neither knows nor loves God as he will be known and loved in the state of glory. But this defect is not imputed since it is proper to man's state as viator. And since it is not imputed, no need is present for a second application of justice.

Also the perfection of this life is defective when compared with Adam's perfection before the fall (and this is due to rebellion of the flesh) but again these defects are not imputed as sin to man, "quia non potest homo illis carere."

If one thinks of man's present state, considered in itself, defects arising from "inherent justice" could be on account of a habit, or an act or "propter aliud adventium sese admiscens."

A defect of grace as a habit can not be considered. For then grace would either be impotent according to its species for meriting glory, as cold is for heating (the example of Christ shows that this is absurd); nor can none speak of an inadequate amount of grace, since grace and glory correspond.

If one speaks of acts that procede from a small amount of grace or in which we make too small a degree of effort, then recall the scripture; "As you sow, so shall you reap." To want to introduce imputed justice here is to wish to sow sparingly and reap lavishly.

Moreover have the proponents of twofold justice ever considered the absurd consequence that follows a new application of Christ's merit: those who are more just will participate less this imputed justice, the less just more.

Basically the proponents of twofold justice deny that works done in charity truly merit. For they say that inherent justice is defective for meriting. This statement is not tenable. If inherent justice is insufficient for glory, is it not also insufficient to truly take away sin, to truly justify us. Yet this is clearly opposed to what St. Paul says in Romans 5: 10.

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[95] What follows is paraphrase of arguments of Laynez - CT, V, 612 ff.

Moreover the doctrine takes away any reason to preserve the traditional doctrines of satisfaction and purgatory which Christians have always seen as the ways to satisfy for the defects of their inherent justice.

Also does it not derogate from the providence of God. For God would not have prepared the means whereby we can obtain eternal life as he has prepared for all other creatures the means they require to obtain the goal he has set for them.

Does not a twofold justice doctrine take away from the power of the Cross of Christ, since we Christians at the day of judgement — although we have had Christ's meritorious work communicated to us — can not by it merit eternal life?

The opposition to Seripando was overwhelming. Although the doctrine of twofold justice was not condemned it was expressly excluded from the final decree which speaking of the causes of justification states: Demum *unica formalis causa* est justitia Dei, non qua ipse justus est, sed qua nos justos facit . . .

## Chapter Four

# COMPARISON OF TRENT AND NIEBUHR

We come now to the most important part of this study: a comparison of Niebuhr's doctrine with that of the Council of Trent. We must obviously limit the discussion to those points of the doctrine of justification which Niebuhr himself touches on. As with any comparison we will point out similarities and differences between Trent and Niebuhr and also seek to find the basic reasons for agreement and disagreement between the doctrine of Niebuhr and that of the Fathers at Trent.

Martin Luther was convinced that the church of the Renaissance had lost the true understanding of grace as preached by St. Paul.[1] The church by its emphasis on external observances and human effort, had ceased to present the true notion of justification as a completely gratuitous gift of God. In fact the church had fallen into the ancient Jewish error of teaching that man by his own efforts was capable of justifying himself.

Niebuhr in like manner stresses the complete gratuity of grace and the process of justification and underlines man's utter powerlessness to move of his own accord from sin to the friendship of God.[2]

Niebuhr clearly teaches that the self, living outside the friendship of God, can not do the good that it intends.[3] It is

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[1] Louis Bouyer, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism,* (London: 1956), p. 25.

[2] "This is the issue upon which the Protestant Reformation separated itself from classical Catholicism, believing that Thomistic interpretations of grace lent themselves to new forms of self-right-eousness in place of the Judaistic legalistic self-righteousness which St. Paul condemned." CPP, pp. 18-19.

[3] HD, pp. 114-120.

too immersed in the vicious circle of self-centerdness. The self apart from God's revelation in Christ lacks both knowledge and power to live according to its essential nature, i.e. to make God the real source and center of its existence and to live in a harmony of love with its fellow-men. The self's failure to do the good is due partly to weakness, partly to dishonest pretensions on the part of the self. The self must be enlightened; its dishonest pretensions and efforts to make itself the center of life and meaning must be revealed for what they are — and, this enlightenment involves the self's being shattered at the very center of its being. But the plight of the self is due more to impotence than to a lack of knowledge. And so the self needs above all an accretion of power, an infusion of grace.

The self that has turned away from sin and toward God, reflecting on this experience is utterly convinced that both the shattering of its old sinful self by the illuminating act of God and the resources of grace that are available to it are completely beyond its own power. They are utterly gratuitous gifts of God. "Just as the truth of God which breaks the vicious circle of false truth, apprehended from the self as the false center, can never be other than "foolishness" to the self-centered self until it has been imparted by "grace" and received by faith; so also the power which breaks the self-centered will must be perceived as power from beyond the self; and even when it has become incorporated into the new will, its source is recognized in the confession: "I, yet not I" [4] ... "When the self stands beyond itself 'by faith', it is conscious of the fact that nothing it has done or can do is free of debt to the miracle of grace." [5]

The Council of Trent also stresses the complete gratuity of grace and man's total incapacity to justify himself. The Fathers at Trent were very sensitive to the charges of the reformers that Catholic teaching on grace was Pelagian. Certainly nothing was further from the truth. There is no evidence of any tendency to minimise the part of grace in man's salvation and to exaggerate the powers of fallen man. The Second Council of Orange in 529 had stressed the utter helplessness of fallen man to ac-

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[4] HD, pp. 119-120.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

complish his own justification:

Canon 3 suggests that the humble prayer of the sinner petitioning the grace of God, is itself due to the action of grace.[6]

Canon 5 rules out any beginning of faith or inclination to faith which is not itself an effect of grace.[7]

Canon 6 excludes *any acts* which dispose us for grace from being placed outside the influence of grace.

"If anyone says that God has mercy on us when, without his grace, we believe, will, desire, strive, work, watch, study, ask, seek, knock, and does not confess that we believe, will and are enable to do all this in the way we ought, by the infusion and inspiration of the Holy Spirit within us; or makes the help of grace depend on the humility and obedince to the free gift of grace; he goes counter to the Apostle who says 'What hast thou that thou hast not received?' and 'By the grace of God I am what I am' (I Cor.4.7, & 15.10)" [8]

The Council of Trent is in obvious agreement:

Chapter 5 while stressing man's cooperation in justification yet insists on this same man's utter dependence on the grace of God.

"The beginning of justification itself in adults is to be understood as the result of the antecedent grace of God through Jesus Christ, that is, it comes from the vocation by which he calls them, without any previous merit on their part, so that those who had been turned from God by their sins, by means of his grace stirring and assisting them to turn to their own justification in freely consenting and cooperating with this grace, are so disposed that, when God touches their hearts by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, they cannot be said to be absolutely inactive in receiving this inspiration — they could, in fact reject it — yet, without the grace of God, they could not move themselves, of their own will, to a state of justice in his sight . . .[9]

Free will is not capable then of the least act towards salvation, unless the grace of God precedes and accompanies it.

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[6] Denz. 373.
[7] Denz. 375.
[8] Denz. 376.
[9] CT, V, pp. 792-93, Denz. 1525.

It is clear that the ancient teaching of Orange is confirmed at the Council of Trent.

Trent and Niebuhr are also in complete agreement that man's need and impotence in the order of salvation are absolute, and God's grace is completely gratuitous.

But if justification is an entirely free gift of the sovereign merciful God, if man is by his own efforts unable to effect even in the slightest degree his own salvation, then the act of justification is exclusively the work of God, and man remains passive. This is precisely what Luther taught. For Luther man is completely passive in the process of justification. Even the faith which appropriates the mercy and forgiveness of Christ is entirely God's work; man remains passive.[10]

The basis of Luther's doctrine of pasive righteousness was of course his conviction that man's freé will in the order of salvation is wholly destroyed by original sin. Here Niebuhr is in sharp disagreement. In the process of justification man can and must cooperate. For Niebuhr man's transcendent freedom is and remains the most significant fact of his essence. "... no sinful self-centredness can ever destroy the structure of freedom and self-transcendence in man"...;[12] The imago Dei remains in man after sin. Niebuhr sees a definite danger in the tendency of the reformers to "deny all human activity in, and responsibility for, repentance or faith."[13]

In fact Niebuhr quotes with approval St. Thomas' analogy regarding the eye and the light of the sun. "He who has his eyes turned away from the light of the sun prepares himself to receive the light of the sun by turning his eyes thither."[14]

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[10] For example this passage cited by Althaus: "Justitia quae ex nobis fit, non est Christiana justitia. Christiana justitia est mere contraria, passiva, quam tantum recipimus, ubi nihil operamur, sed patimur alium operari in nobis scilicet Deum." W.A. 40 I, 41, 2; cited by Althaus Paul, Die Theologie Martin Luthers, Gutersloh, 1962, p. 198.

[11] Althaus, *op. cit.*, p. 141; Flick, *op. cit.*, p. 53 ff.

[12] HD, p. 121.

[13] HD, p. 122.

[14] "Hoc autem est praeparare se ad gratiam, quasi ad Deum converti: sicut ille qui habet oculum aversum a lumine solis, per hoc se praeparat ad recipiendum lumen solis, quod oculos suos convertit versus solem." I-II, 2. 109, a. 6; cited in HD, p. 122.

Niebuhr fully approves of Thomas' insistence on the possibility and necessity of human cooperation in the process of justification.[15] For Niebuhr "the real situation is that both affirmations — that only God in Christ can break and reconstruct the sinful self, and that the self must "open the door" and is capable of doing so — are equally true; and they are both unqualifiedly true, each on their own level. Yet either affirmation becomes false if it is made without reference to the other." [16]

The Fathers at Trent also affirmed that man can and must cooperate in the process of justification. For man's will remains free and he can cooperate. Original sin does not destroy man's freedom although the will is "inclinatum et attenuatum." [17] The errors of the reformers and especially Luther are explicitly rejected: "Si quis liberum hominis arbitrium post Adae peccatum amissum et exstinctum esse dixerit, aut rem esse de solo titulo immo titulum sine re, figmentum denique a satana invectum in Ecclesiam, A.S." [18]

Man not only can but must cooperate in the process of justification. Some of the theologians did not express this cooperation satisfactorily. (We have noted this above). These are considered to have spoken "non satis catholicae." [19] The rest agreed with the summary of the theologians; "Deus sua gratia praevenit, consentit homo." [20] And as the Bishop of Majorca expressed it: "When we are justified, we consent to the justice of God.[21] And in the final decree it is stated that man must prepare himself for justification "gratiae libere assentiendo et cooperando." [22]

We find further agreement when we consider the mode of cooperation. It is clear that man can and must cooperate in the

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[15] HD, p. 122.
[16] HD, p. 122.
[17] CT, V, p. 792, cap. 1 Denz. 1521.
[18] CT, V, p. 798, 5. Cf. Denz. 1555.
[19] CT, V, p. 274.
[20] CT, V, p. 337.
[21] CT, V, p. 292.
[22] CT, V, 792, cap. 5. Cf. Denz. 1525.

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work of his justification. But what does man do. What acts can he elicit?

Luther believed man remains passive and that it is vain to talk of dispositions in man that precede justification since sinful man is not capable of any act except fides fiducialis which is exclusively God's work in man and is part of the very substance of justification.[23]

For Niebuhr, man responding to the divine initiative is by no means passive. Under the impulse of divine grace man in his transcendent freedom places acts of faith, despair, fear contrition and hope. When one analizes these various acts which for Niebuhr proced justification, one is struck by the strong emphasis he gives to faith as a means of apprehending truth, as an intellectual assent.

*Faith*

Niebuhr will never give a formal definition of faith. But time and again he will lay stress on faith as a sole means of access to truth: "truth which transcends the human situation." [24] These truths are clearly distinct from and surpass any conclusions of metaphysics. They constitute true wisdom. Man has a "capacity for the apprehension of the true wisdom" [25] that neither his finiteness nor sin can destroy. This true wisdom which is the object of faith is God's self disclosure in Christ. God's self revelation, which only the man in faith can apprehend, has a definite content; truths about God, truths concerning human nature. This revelation culminates in the Cross where the final revelation (of God as suffering love, of man as by nature destined to Agape) is manifested. All these truths are accessible to faith alone.

It is certainly true that Niebuhr never seeks a precise analysis of faith (as St. Thomas did) by analogy with other operations of the transcendent self. It is also true that he uses faith in the

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[23] Hefner, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
[24] HD, p. 59.
[25] HD, p. 66.

meaning of trust: "the ideal possibility is that faith in the ultimate security of God's love would overcome all immediate insecurities of nature and history." [26] And he does this without seeking to relate the two uses of faith. But Niebuhr does certainly emphasize what one might call the dogmatic function of faith — its giving man access to truth.

This is where the emphasis lies for Niebuhr. Faith gives man access to truths since only by faith can man grasp the significance of the events which are at the basis of saving history and which culminate in the crucifixion. Faith alone can rescue man from the threat of meaninglessness which is ever present at the boundary of any rational endeavour. In his concept of faith, as we shall see, Niebuhr's position is closer to that of Trent than of Luther.

We have seen that the self is impotent to realize what its essential being demands: a life of love in harmony with its fellow-men.[27] And moreover the self inevitably makes itself the false center of existence, life and meaning and seeks to subject other life to itself.[28] This self-centered self must first be sharrered and broken.[29] And for Niebuhr this means that the self must first encounter God as an enemy, that is as a judge who reveals how far the proud rebellious self has departed from the norm of life. This encounter which takes place at the cross reveals also what God endures for man's sin.[30] Immediately in this encouter with the suffering Christ the soul is brought to despair since its self-esteem and self-centered life is now seen as proud frantic rebellion. This despair is an absolutely necessary prelude to contrition.[31] Here it is clear that by despair Niebuhr simply means that the self has realized at last that

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[26] HN, p. 195.
[27] HD, p. 112.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 112.
[29] *ibid.*, p. 113.
[30] HD, p. 59.
[31] "The knowledge that sin causes suffering to God is an indication of the seriousness of sin. It is by that knowledge that man is brought to despair. Without this despair there is no possibility of the contrition which appropriates the divine forgiveness." HN, p. 59.

it cannot make itself the center of life, nor complete its own life, and it sees now what it had only dimly realised: how sinful and pathetic are its efforts to escape its contingent, finite existence. Despair in this context is certainly not the despair that has God's promises for its object and is in opposition to the theological virtue of hope. No, it is the anxiety which accompanies man's freedom and which is so heightened that it is transmuted into despair. Niebuhr clearly means that the self is brought to a state where it despairs of completing life by its own efforts. The self in a word, must give up its preoccupations with itself and admit at the same time the sinful nature of these preoccupations.[32]

Out of this despair contrition is conceived; and in this contrition or repentance faith is born. "The self is shattered whenever it is confronted by the power and holiness of God and becomes genuinely conscious of the real source and center of all life. In Christian faith Christ mediates the confrontation of the self by God; for it is in Christ that the vague sense of the divine, which human life never loses, is crystallized into a revelation of a divine mercy and judgement. In that revelation fear of judgement and hope of mercy are so mingled that despair produces repentance and repentance hope." [33]

Niebuhr does not always explicitly and clearly state that all of these dispositions are the work of grace. Indeed one might think that knowledge alone is imparted to the self in the encounter with Christ, and that the fear, despair, contrition and hope that follow this encounter are merely the work of the self.[34] But in many passages Niebuhr does state clearly that grace is presupposed in the entire process.[35]

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[32] It is interesting to note that Niebuhr speaks of a twofold despair: "There is always the alternative of despair, the 'sorrow of the world,' to the creative despair which induces a new faith." HD, p. 214.

[33] HD, p. 113.

[34] This point is raised by Rachel King in her recent book "The Omission of the Holy Spirit from Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology," (New York: 1964) pp. 173-174. We will consider the difficulties she raises in the final section.

[35] Grace is presupposed in the entire process of justification. Where does Niebuhr say this?:

One must admit that Niebuhr says very little regarding the precise nature of these various acts, that is, acts of fear, despair, contrition and hope that precede justification. As regards how they are related to one another, he says merely: "It is not possible to give a fully logical or exactly chronological account of the relation of faith to repentance," . . .[36]

*Repentance*

The reason for this is that faith and repentance are so intimately and indissolubly linked together.

Repentance as Niebuhr uses the word is clearly contrition or sorrow for sin. He attempts a descriptive definition of repentance by distinguishing it from another act which resembles it: remorse. The basic difference between the two is that repentance has God as its object and presupposes faith. While both are free acts repentance is the expression of freedom and faith, remorse is the expression of freedom without faith. "The one is the godly sorrow of which St. Paul speaks," and the other is "the sorrow of this world which worketh death." [36a] Although Niebuhr does not expressly say so, remorse is obviously that natural sorrow or disgust which any man can experience after yeielding to some exorbitant demand of his self love. This weariness or disgust with self can of itself only lead to despair.

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1) ". . . the power which breaks the self-centred will must be perceived as power from beyond the self." HD, p. 120.

2) "it (justifying faith) is a gift of grace because neither the faith nor the repentance required for the knowledge of the true God, revealed in the Cross and the Resurrection, can be attained by taking thought." FH, p. 151.

3) "there is thus in the Christian religion a challenge to a higher honesty and morality and the consciousness of an unattained purity which man can not achieve himself but which lies in the hands of God to impart." BT, p. 142.

[36] HD, p. 104.

[36a] HN, p. 271.

Repentance, which always leads to hope and reformation of life, is ever paired with faith and must ever serve as the basis for faith. For God's self-revelation cannot be apprehended by faith without repentance because we must contritely abate the pretension of reaching God by our thought or of regarding his power as an extension of our power. One must contritely recognize the contradiction in life and admit the reality and power of self love which is capable of such monstrous pretentions, a self love whose corrosive force renders all human virtues problematic.

Yet faith can also be seen as the pre-supposition for repentance as it is also the basis for the other dispositions which precede justification. As Niebuhr expresses it: "if a man does not know the truth about God, who is more than an extension of his self (a truth to be known only by faith), he cannot repent of the premature and self centered completion of his life around a partial and inadequate center. But it can be, and has been argued with equal cogency, that without repentance, that is without the shattering of the self centered self, man is too much his own god to feel the need of, or to have the capacity for, knowing the true God." [36b] (HD, p. 104).

In Chapter Six of the final decree Trent describes the manner in which man prepares for justification. It is clear from the wording of the final decree and from the discussion preceding it that allof the dispositions preceding justification are placed under the influence of divine grace: "Disponuntur autem ad ipsam justitiam, dum excitati divina gratia et adjuti . . . " [37] One must also keep in mind the statement of the presiding officer, the papal legate Cardinal Cervini who said that the Fathers wished to describe the various dispositions (mentioned in Chapter Six of the final decree) in a general way without insisting on

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[36b] HD, p. 104.

[37] "The Grace of God for man and the Kingdom of God for history are both divine realities and not human possibilities." CPP, p. 21. FH, p. 191 "If we would understand that all forms of holiness and all signs of redemption in actual history are not merely extensions of human wisdom or human virtue but are the consequence of a radical break through of the divine spirit."

a logical or chronological order, nor did the Fathers intend that all of the dispositions mentioned be always present.[38]

At the very beginning of work on the decree on justification the Fathers were asked to consider why St. Paul seems at times to attribute the work of justification almost exclusively to faith.[39] After a prolonged discussion and much disagreement as we have seen between Scotists and Thomists the following formula was adopted: Ut scilicet per fidem ideo justificare dicamur, quia "fides est humanae salutis *initium*", *fundamentum* et *radix* omnis justificationis, sine qua impossible est placere Deo."[40] Thus when Paul says that we are justified by faith, (Rom. 3 22, 24), this is because faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and the root of every justification. This is how the Church had always understood Paul's words. What the Fathers at Trent wanted to stress was that faith by its very nature has a certain preeminence over all the other dispositions that man freely places under the influence of divine grace.[41] For in relation to the other dispositions faith is the beginning, it is the first movement of man toward God; it is the *foundation* since all the other dispositions presuppose it and depend on it; it is the root of every justification, fear, contrition, hope, precede from it. As to the meaning of the expression "omnis justificationis" Cardinal Cervini commented as follow: "because both in the disposition and at the moment of justification, as well as in the very exercise and increase of justification, faith is always the foundation and the root of justification; thus one uses the expression every."[42]

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[38] Theiner, *Acta genuina concilii Tridentine* (Zagreb: 1874) Tom I, p. 369.

[39] CT, V, p. 261.

[40] CT, V, p. 794, cap. 8. Cf. Denz. 1532. The statement of De Vega: "Non ita patres harum sex dispositionum hoc loco meminernt, ut asserere voluerint eas omnes necessarias esse et neminem vel una earum deficiente justificari." De Vega, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

[41] See Section "e" in Chapter on Trent. Cf. also CT, V, p. 270, 316, 324.

[42] "Quia tam in dispositione, quam in instanti justificationis, quam etiam in exercitatione et augmento semper fides est fundamentum et radix justificationis; ideo dicitur omnis." CT, I, p. 456; V, p. 734; also see Schmaus, M. Dogmatiks III 2, 300.

What kind of faith are the Fathers at Trent referring to? It is obvious that dogmatic faith is intended and not "fides fiducialis." [43] We find the Council stressing the fact that the faith it speaks of is an assent to truth: "believing those things to be true which have been divinely revealed and promised, and that above all the wicked are justified by God through his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." [44]

The object of the act of justifying faith is above all that God justifies the wicked through grace, through the redemption that occurs in Christ Jesus. In Canon 12 it is stated that whoever says that justifying faith is *nothing other than* trust in the divine mercy forgiving sins on account of Christ, A.S.[45]

We can see then that justifying faith includes or is joined to a trust in the divine mercy but that first man must believe, accept as true what God has revealed, and in particular one must accept as true the promises of merciful forgiveness before one can hope in them. Yet in the teaching of Trent, hope in the divine promises is closely linked to faith for Pauline faith always has an aspect of trust.[46]

Faith then is seen as the fitting and free response of man to God in the process of justification. Lyonnet has beautifully stated how faith is man's fitting and free response to the justifying activity of God:

*a*) "it is on the one hand the act most free (by definition) and therefore most human.

*b*) it is on the other hand the act in which man expressly and formally manifests his radical insufficiency in so far as man affirms some truth not as a result of his own efforts but

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[43] Stakemeier, E. Glaube und Rechtfertigung, p. 62.

[44] "Credentes, vera esse, quae divinitus revelata et promissa sunt, atque illud in primis, a Deo justificari impium per gratiam ejus per redemptionem, quae est in Christo Jesu." CT, V, p. 793, Cap. 6; Denz. 1526.

[45] CT, V, p. 798, Can. 12: "Si quis dixerit, fidem justificantem nihil aliud esse quam fiduciam divinae misericordiae, peccata remittentis propter Christum, vel eam fiduciam solam esse, qua justificamur, anathema sit."

[46] Prat, F. *The Theology of St. Paul,* Vol. 2, p. 173.

"because of the authority of God revealing; man certainly knows, sees and understands, yet not by his own light of reason, but by means of light infused by another; faith is thus an act which even less than his other acts man can ascribe to himself." [47]

St. Thomas expresses as succinctly as possible the role of faith in justification: "to believe is the first act of justice which God works in him (the sinner); for because he believes in God justifying, he subjects himself to his justification and thus receives its effect." [48]

Next those who are to be justified, realising that they are sinners, experience a salutary fear of divine justice. From fear the soul is drawn to consider the mercy of God and is moved to trust in him and begins also to love him as the source of all justice and is moved to a penance which consists in a hatred and detestation of sin.[49]

*Fear*

Throughout the months of discussion the problem of timor servilis was ever at hand. Luther had frequently and vehemently rejected any sorrow for sin which had its origin in a fear of divine punishments. Such fear in his view was hypocritical and itself sinful.[50] The Fathers, as the discussion reveals, had no

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[47] Lyonnet, Stanislaus, Exegesis Epistulae ad Romanos (Cap. 1-4) Rome 1963, p. 248. *a*) "ex una parte actus est maxime liber — per definitionem — ideoque maxime "humanus." *b*) ex altera parte actus est in quo eliciendo homo expresse formaliterque insufficientiam suam radicalem testatur, quatenus asserit quidem aliquam veritatem, non vero proprio marte sed "propter auctoritatem Dei revelantis"; homo cognoscit quidem, videt atque intelligit, lumine tamen non proprio sed ab altero infuso; actus igitur quem *minus quam ceteros actus suos,* sibi adscribere potest."

[48] Comm. on Romans, chapter 4, verse 5. "Ipsum credere est primus actus justitiae, quam Deus in eo operatur; ex eo enim quod credit in Deum justificantem, justificationi ejus subicit se et sic recipit ejus effectum."

[49] CT, V, p. 793.

[50] Sermo de poenitentia, WA I, S. 319.

difficulty in rejecting this view of a fear of punishments. They saw (as the July form states) such a fear as useful. But whenever they tried to determine the precise nature or the exact moral quality of this fear, or its relation to sorrow and to love, they were involved in controversy.

And thus in the September and November decrees and in the final version it was necessary to condemn Luther's stand, (thus saying implicitly that at least some fear of divine justice was useful for salvation) without determining the precise nature of a useful fear of divine penalties, nor indicating its moral status nor suggesting the relationship of fear to the other dispositions for justification.[51]

Only in the final month of work on the decree, did the theologians and Fathers consider whether love should be named among the dispositions for justification. On December 3, 9 questions were voted on, among them "An in dispositionibus sit ponendum aliquid de dilectione, an acquivalenter insinuanda . . .?" [52]

In the vote that followed 25 of the 52 Fathers voted in favour of love being mentioned among the dispositions. What kind of love was intended? It could not be the love of charity. Not that all of the Fathers and theologians agreed with the Thomist view that an act of charity could only proceed from the infused virtue of charity. Scotists like De Vega would not agree to this. But the discussion reveals that the love named here is not the love of charity. Salmeron had already mentioned on June 23, when discussing the acts that preceed justification, a certain act of love, ("actus amoris cujusdam").[53] Seripando on August 11 also referred to an act of love as part of the dispositions. He called it a love of justice or a love of the splendour and beauty of justice.[54]

Why did the Fathers wish to make any mention of love as a part of the preparation for justification? A statement prepared

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[51] In the final decree the disposition of fear is simply described as salutary (in chapter 6), and in Canon 8 the Lutheran notion that every fear of penalties is sinful, is condemned.

[52] CT, V, p. 687.

[53] CT, V, p. 268.

[54] CT, V, p. 824.

by Seripando and Massarelli in defense of the September decree gives the answer. "It seemed wrong to some that besides penance another movement of charity is required. There is no mention in that section (Chapter 6 of the decree) of the habit of charity but since the section dealing with penance has no mention of love, it was seen useful to join with faith and hope some act of love, because if penance were entirely from fear without the love of justice, and if sorrow were because of penalty only, and not because of an offense against God, such penance and such sorrow would be unfruitful." (CT, V, p. 520) [55]

In the same document a few lines further on the best description of this love is given: "Love here is not the habit of charity nor the act proceeding from it but some act of the love of justice, a justice which is not man's possession but which he desires to have. For as Augustine says, Cornelius had already a certain faith as he prayed and gave alms, although he was not yet justified, so there is also a certain love which is not the love of a man already justified but the love of one who hungers for justice." (Ibid., p. 520) [56] Was it merely a love of concupiscence, a love of God as the soul's good, or did the Fathers intend a higher love, a love of benevolence which would tend to love God for his own sake and yet fall short of the love of charity? The question is still argued to this day. It remains a moot point.[57]

Again the expression "some hatred of sin" was used as Musso remarked to distinguish this hatred of sin which belongs to the dispositions preceding justification, from the perfect hatred of sin which accompanies the grace of justification.[58]

We see that as regards the preparation for justification there are many points of similarity between Niebuhr and Trent. In actual fact they are in agreement that man must consent to

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[55] CT, V, p. 520.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 520.

[57] See among others, G. Spykman, "Attrition and Contrition at the Council of Trent," (Kampen: 1955) pp. 114-145; V. Heynck, "Zum Problem der unvollkommenden Reue auf dem Konzil von Trient." Vol. I, pp. 231-280 in *Welt Konzil von Trient.*

[58] CT, V, p. 702.

the justifying action of God. God alone justifies man. Man left to himself is incapable of obtaining justice — either by following the law or the inclinations of his own nature. There is nothing in man that can lay claim to the justifying grace of God. Yet in the process of justification man is not passive. He must consent to the justifying action of God.

While the area of agreement is quite obvious, we must seek to find the basic reason for agreement between Niebuhr and Trent.

A priori one would not expect to find any fundamental positions on which Trent and Niebuhr could agree. The very term "neo-orthodox" as applied to Niebuhr's theology would seem to preclude it. The term was applied to Niebuhr's thought to signify his concern to recover for Protestant theology the basic insights of the reformers, especially Luther; insights that were either lost or obscured by the liberal theology which was in possession when Niebuhr began his work of teaching and writing. On the other hand the major concern of the Fathers at Trent was to measure the basic teachings of Luther against the point for point the two teaching on justification and to show how point for point the two doctrines were incompatible. Thus any major agreement between Niebuhr and Trent is to say the least unexpected.

However such an area does exist. We have already seen that Niebuhr does not hesitate to criticize Luther or to redefine Luther's doctrine of justification by faith. His point of departure is the doctrine of the imago Dei. Man as imago Dei signifies simply man in his transcendent freedom. This transcendent freedom remains after sin and when one analizes the implications involved in man's transcendent freedom, one sees that man has a natural capacity for being acted on by God. Man can be elevated by God's action to a level of truth and grace that is beyond his own unaided power to achieve.

What does man in his moments of introspection discover? When man turns in on himself and seeks to understand himself

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[59] Gordon Harland, *The Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr*, New York, 1960: VIII.

in his transcendence, he encounters God. Man's encounter with God is not the fruit of a priori or a posteriori reasoning. No, that is an immediate spontaneous experience. More exactly it is an overtone of all man's other experiences.[60] As we have already briefly indicated man encounters God experiencing a sense of absolute dependence. Here Niebuhr is clearly echoing the teaching of Schleiermacher.[61] Accompanying this feeling of absolute dependence on a transcendent being, is a sense of sin, a feeling of having been judged and found lacking in the proper attitude of subjection and obedience to this transcendent being.[62] And finally man experiences a longing for forgiveness which is the most problematic and ill-defined of the three aspects of general revelation.[63]

It is not our purpose to consider the validity of Niebuhr's theory of how man first encounters God. Nor do we wish to repeat the arguments against fideism which seems to be close to Niebuhr's position and which the Catholic Church has always rejected.[64] Nor is it within the scope of this study to consider the a posteriori arguments for God's existence. We simply want to *underline* the *fact* that for Niebuhr man does have a natural knowledge of God — on the level of immediate experience. And thus man is capable of being raised to a higher level of truths — man can receive more precise revelations about God. By faith man can begin to possess truths known only to God and that are completely inaccessible to man, left to his own resources. God as revealed in the bible, communicates truths about Himself that the self can only apprehend by faith. Yet the self recognizes the God of historical revelation as the same God it has experienced in personal confrontation.[65]

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[60] "The experience of God is not so much a separate experience, as an overtone implied in all experience." HN, pp. 136-137.

[61] Niebuhr gives no precise reference to Schleiermacher but says: "Schleiermacher describes this experience of God as the experience of unqualified dependence." HD, p. 137.

[62] HN, p. 137.

[63] *op. cit.*, p. 141.

[64] L. Billot, *De Deo Uno et Trino*, Rome 1935, p. 14, 15. For a discussion of Fideism see Denz. 3004 and 3026.

[65] "Faith in the transcendent God, as revealed in personal experience

Man has also a natural desire for the good. More precisely man sees that the very structure of his transcendent self requires him to live in a harmony of love with his fellow-men. This norm of love is made more precise and compelling by the revelation of Christ as the second Adam. Christ's selfsacrificing love on the cross is seen as the only norm which can be adequate for the self in its transcendence.[66] The grace or power of God mediated in Christ is a power to fulfill the most basic impulse of man's nature. From Christ comes power to fulfill man's basic requirement to live a life of Agape and also merciful forgiveness enabling man to bear the fact that he can never escape the corruptive force of egotism.

Man as imago Dei has, then, a natural knowledge of God. Man can be elevated by faith and his natural knowledge of God completed by the truths God communicates in historical revelation and that man can only apprehend by faith.

Man as imago Dei is also in a position to see that self-giving love is the most basic requirement of his essential nature. Christ as second Adam only gives precision and motive power to this norm. But above all the self lacks power to break through its shell of egotism and follow its true norm of Agape. The self encounters Christ as a judge who shatters its self-complacent love of self and as a merciful redeemer who mediates grace and power enabling the self (though ever imperfectly) to fulfill the basic demand of its nature. The encounter with Christ releases the self to a life of love of God and neighbour. The content of the imago Dei is not destroyed by sin.

Niebuhr criticizes the tendency in Protestant theology to assert that the imago Dei in man is completely destroyed by original sin and that no point of contact remains. He rejects

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and in the character of the whole creation, is the ground upon which the Biblical historical revelation is built up; ... Biblical revelation ... is rather the record of those events in history in which faith discerns the self-disclosure of God. What it discerns are actions of God which clarify the confrontation of man by God in the realm of the personal and individual moral life." HN, pp. 146-147.

[66] "The perpetual relevance of the norm of Agape to the structure of human existence lies in the fact that it is ... the fulfilment of the self's freedom" ... HN, pp. 178-179.

the position of Karl Barth that between sinful man and the God of revelation, no point of contact remains which God himself does not create. For Barth nothing remains in sinful man that can be elevated to a higher order of truth and grace. The truth and grace of God's revealing action stand in complete contradiction to man's sinful nature.[67]

God's justifying action which takes place in Christ finds definite points of contact (Anknüpfungspunkte) even in sinful man.[68] The transcendent self possesses a natural knowledge of God in immediate experience and is open to God's historical revelation of truths that only faith can apprehend. The transcendent self above all remains free so that it can freely respond to God's forgiving sanctifying action. We have already seen how strongly Niebuhr defends the freedom of the self and how he insists that man can and must freely cooperate with God's justifying grace.[63] Moreover God's action in justification is not in contradiction to the self's genuine true inclination. Since the grace and truth revealed in Christ merely shatter the sinful self and enable the true self to live, however imperfectly, on a level of Agape which the self alone sees is the only fitting path its freedom can take.[69]

The Council of Trent does not explicitly mention but clearly presupposes the doctrine that was always part of traditional

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[67] When Barth makes statements like "man is man and not a cat" in describing the sinful state of man, it is clear that he wishes to eliminate all points of contact which God's saving activity might find in man. Cf. Barth's brochure, Nein, p. 27.

[68] "... no sinful self-centredness can ever destroy the structure of freedom and self-transcendence in man, ... HD, p. 121.

[69] "The fact is that the revelation of the 'Cross of Christ' does not super-impose, but merely clarifies, the truth about man's situation when ultimately considered. The situation which is clarified by the Christian faith can be validated by common experience. It is that the self is bound to destroy itself by seeking itself too narrowly, that it must forget itself to realise itself, but that this self-forgetfulness cannot be induced by the calculation that a more ultimate form of self-realisation will flow from the forgetfulness. The ethic of the Cross therefore clarifies, but does not create, a norm which is given by the very constitution of selfhood." SDH, p. 232.

Catholic teaching.[70] It is simply the doctrine of "potentia obedientialis" that St. Augustine, the early scholastics, St. Thomas' contemporaries and St. Thomas himself clearly held.

St. Augustine says in De Prae. Sanc. V that to be capable of having faith and to be capable of having charity belongs to man's nature; but to have faith and charity belongs to the grace of the faithful.[71]

Without using the term St. Augustine was affirming the reality of the doctrine of obediential potency. Man has, as image of God, an intellect and will that can be elevated to a higher order of grace and truth under the influence of God's operation.

Prosper of Aquitain repeats faithfully Augustine's formula. "Posse habere fidem, sicut posse habere caritatem, natura est hominum; habere autem fidem sicut habere caritatem, gratia est fidelium." [72]

The early scholastics (e.g. Stephen Langton), as Landgraf has stated, did not know the term but they were aware of the reality of a capacity for the divine in man.[73]

St. Thomas himself sees the doctrine as the presupposition of every treatment of God's redeeming, justifying action.

For St. Thomas, because man is a rational creature, he is open to all truth and goodness — thus by his nature he is capable of God. For example St. Thomas in treating of man's ultimate end writes: "Objectum autem voluntatis, quae est appetitus humanus, est universale bonum; sicut objectum intellectus est universale verum. Ex quo patet quod nihil potest qiuetare voluntatem hominis, nisi bonum universale. Quod non invenitur in aliquo creato, sed solum in Deo." [74]

Hence man's spiritual nature, possessing intellect and free will is ordered not to such a being or to such a particular good, but to all being, and all good — and thus — God alone can fulfill the inclinations of the rational creature.

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[70] Stakemeier, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[71] Cited by Schmaus, *op. cit.*, p. 181, 182.

[72] Num 316 (SSL 45, 1887) cited by Landgraf, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

[73] A.M. Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*, Erste Teil, Bd, II p. 243.

[74] Ia IIae, q. 2 a. 8.

In De Malo, q 2, art. II — St. Thomas stresses the capacity — or the aptitude of the soul to be elevated by God to a level it could not attain by its own efforts. "Sicut lumen a sole diffunditur in aerem, ita gratia a Deo infunditur animae, quae quidem est supra naturam animae, et lumen in natura animae vel cujuscumque creaturae rationalis est aptitudo quaedam ad gratiae susceptionem."

In the Summa St. Thomas treating of grace stresses the same doctrine ($I^a$ $II^{ae}$, q 113, a 10): "Naturaliter anima est gratiae capax, eo enim ipso quod facta est ad imaginem Dei capax est Dei per gratiam, ut Augustinus dicit."

So by the very fact that man is created in God's image, he is capable of grace. As creature of intellect and will he has an aptitude or capacity for being raised to the level of grace under God's action.

There is sharp disagreement among followers of St. Thomas as to whether human nature is simply capable of being elevated to a higher order of faith and charity under God's influence or is human nature, as imago Dei, positively ordered to a higher order, to a supernatural union with God.[75]

Both schools find arguments in St. Thomas — we must prescind from the argument and state that all agree that nature has a capability of reaching a supernatural level, of being elevated by God to share in an order of truth and life that surpasses the natural.

Here is where Niebuhr and Trent are in basic accord — Trent never talks about the doctrine of obediential potency, but clearly presupposes it. Niebuhr explicitly affirms man is so constituted in his transcendent freedom that he can be elevated to a level of truth and grace that surpass his natural capacity without contradicting but fulfilling his natural inclinations.

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[75] See the encyclical Humani Generis — Denz. 3891; H. de Lubac, *Surnaturel Etudes Historiques,* (Paris: 1946); H. Rondet, *Gratia Christi,* (Paris: 1948); H. Bouillard, *Conversion et grace chez St. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: 1944); G. de Broglie, *De fine ultime humanae vitae,* (Paris: 1948); P.J. Donelly "The Gratuity of the Beatific Vision and the Possibility of a Natural Destiny", TS II (1950) pp. 374-404; G. Weigel, "Historical Background of the Encyclical Humani Generis", TS, 12 (1951), pp. 520-49; K. Rahner, *Nature and Grace,* (London: 1963).

## Chapter Five

## COMPARISON CONTINUED

Continuing the comparison between Niebuhr's doctrine and that of Trent we must now ask what is the effect in man of this process of justification, or in the language of scholastic theology what is the term of the process?

Niebuhr speaks of a new self as the term of the process of justification. In what way is the justified self new? What precisely is this newness of life which he attributes to the new self? Is it something similar to what Trent describes as the end of the movement called justification, that is, an inherent gift which God infuses into the soul and which remains in the soul of the justified?

Perhaps we could give a tentative yes when we consider certain statements of Niebuhr. With the shattering of the old self which occurs in the encounter with the crucified Christ, new resources have been made available to man. Man gains access to resources which he does not have of himself, which come from God (this is the power of God in man) and which enable man to become what he truly ought to be. And with this comes the gift of the "Holy Spirit", the spirit of God dwelling in man. More precisely these resources, Deus in nobis, are gifts of love, wisdom and power which come down to man. Man experiences this as newness of life.[1]

But then one must answer no, a decisive no if one is thinking that this new life involves an absolute distinction from the old life. If one claims that sin as a basic habitual attitude of man is eradicated or if one believes that the new life means man

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[1] Niebuhr speaks of "endless possibilities of renewal and rebirth." FH, p. 28.

can now live in basic harmony with God and his fellows or that under the impulse of this new life he can place acts of themselves pleasing to God.[2]

Niebuhr never explicitly rejects the teaching of Trent that the favour of God, his gracious merciful turning toward man in Christ, must involve a change in man in the innermost center of his being. In actual fact Niebuhr expressly approves the canon in which Trent as he says rejects the idea "that grace is pardon only" (of canon XI). No it must be more than pardon. The reformers at times forgot that it is also a *power* of *righteousness*.[3] But when we look closely at what is involved or what this power of righteousness means, we see that one cannot reconcile his statements or his idea of the new self with Trent's concept of what occurs in the soul of the justified.

1) According to Niebuhr sin is never entirely overcome in the human heart. For Trent there is nothing that can be properly called sin that remains in the justified.[4]

2) Sin includes and comprehends all man's actions and this is as true of man after the process of justification, or regeneration as before.

For Trent so intimate is the union of the justified with Christ. So powerful are the effects of this union in terms

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[2] Niebuhr speaks often of the new life of the justified as having "...a continued incompleteness and a certain persistence of the strategy of sin." HD, p. 104 or ... "the conquest of sin in the heart of man on the one hand and the merciful power of God over the sin which is never entirely overcome in any human heart on the other"... HD, p. 104.

[3] "It would be wrong to create the impression that the Council of Trent was always wrong in defining its position in opposition to the Reformation. Very frequently it was rightly concerned to guard one side of the paradox of grace: that it is a power of righteousness against the tendency towards moral defeatism and anti-nomianism in the Reformation." (He then cites Canon 22 with approval) ..."Canon 11 contains an equally valid protest against the ideal grace is pardon only... HD, p. 147.

[4] HD, p. 102; CT, V, p. 239. Cf. Denz. 1515: Si quis per Jesu Christi Domini Nostri gratiam, quae in baptismate confertur, reatum originalis peccati remitti negat, aut etiam asserit, non tolli totum id, quod veram et propriam pecati rationem habet, sed illud dicit tantam radi aut non imputari: anathema sit.

of grace and charity, that under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, and operating with gifts of faith and charity the justified can place actions that are of themselves pleasing to God.[5]

3) Niebuhr is convinced that a basic contradction remains between even the justified and God. And so powerful is the corruptive force of egotism or self-love that no matter what level of virtue man attains he remains in as much need of forgiveness at the end of his life as at the beginning.

Trent in considering the problem of the teaching of double justification same to grips with this problem. It insisted that the proponents of this doctrine overlooked the meaning of the union which is established between the justified and Christ.[6]

Against this background of a persistent enduring sinfulness in the life of the redeemed, Niebuhr uses a formula to explain what this power of righteousness means, what Deus in nobis signifies. It is a formula that is more perplexing than enlightening. Sin is overcome in principle, but not in fact. This means that under the influence of grace there is a conscious turning of the self from its self and a turning in love and obedience toward Christ. The new self desires to live in relations of agape with God and its fellow-man. But the corrupting forces of egotism remain. Sin is not overcome in fact and in each new action the redeemed self is found again *entangled* in opposition to God's will. But God accepts the *desires* of the new self for achieve-

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[5] A constantly repeated theme of Niebuhr's is the persistence of sin "which is ..."never entirely overcome in any human heart,"...; HD, p. 104. Perfectionists err when they overlook the fact that "forgiveness is as necessary at the end as at the beginning of the Christian life." *ibid.*, p. 109.

For Trent man can obey the commandments: "Nam Deus impossibilia non jubet, sed jubendo monet, et facere quod possis, et petere quod non possis, et adujovat ut possis cujus mandata gravia non sunt, cuius juqum suave est et onus leve. Qui enim sunt filii dei, Christum diligunt; qui autem diligunt eum (ut ipsemet testatur) servant sermones ejus, quod utique cum divino auxilio praestare possunt." CT, V, p. 795 Cf. Denz. 1536.

[6] HD, p. 109; also see section on double justice.

ments. He imputes the perfections of the crucified Christ to the believer and this is the basis of love joy and peace.[7]

The emphasis then is on a *psychological state* of the new self. The self is conscious that by a new accession of power it has turned away from its sinful self-centeredness. It *desires* to live with and in harmony with the self-giving love of Christ which it sees as the true and only adequate norm and law of life. It realises that it is in action betrayed into sin by the persistent force of egotism. But God accepts its desires as achievement. The self has a sense of being reborn, an experience of love joy and peace which is based on its realization that the perfections of Christ are imputed to it; but above all this sense of serenity in the face of its constant sinfulness is based on the fact that it is fully known and fully forgiven. Niebuhr's great concern is to see that the Christian never again falls into the self-righteousness that was true of the Jews under the old dispensation and that the Catholic Church still retains as its official attitude.

Niebuhr's reading of the bible convinces him that man's enduring sinfulness is a doctrine which both the individual and the churches too easily and willingly obscure or forget. What Niebuhr wants to do is to avoid any doctrine that:

1) denies the possibility of sinfulness in the life of the redeemed. One must affirm not only the possibility but the inevitability of the justified contradicting God's will.[8]

2) Grace then is primarily forgiveness — this is where the emphasis lies for St. Paul. This is the insight lost by the Church and recovered by the reformers.[9]

3) Moreover in understanding the meaning of justification, one must not subordinate justification to sanctification. This means one must not insist as Catholic theories on grace do, that the justified self can bring its life to such a state of completion as Catholic teachings claim. Man stands as

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[7] HD, pp. 106 ff.

[8] *Ibid*, pp. 106-7.

[9] "... the primary Pauline emphasis, his idea of grace ass... the assurance of divine forgiveness". In Luther also there is ..."a new emphasis on the place of forgiveness in grace." HD, p. 107, p. 194.

much in need of forgiveness at the end of his life as at the beginning.[10]

When we see or meditate on these statements we are easily tempted to say that grace for Niebuhr has no other significance except God's forgiveness. Man remains a sinner, constantly sinful, and he needs every day God's forgiveness.

One can easily focus on such statements and say that for Niebuhr justification simply means forgiveness. But to do this is to overlook the dialectical nature of his thought. Grace is not only Deus pro nobis, but Deus in nobis. The self is in some sense a new self. It is in some sense capable of breaking with its old sinful self. Yes but what does this new self mean, what does it signify. We can only repeat that it means a psychological change. By virtue of his new life man becomes spiritual minded — man acknowledge his sinfulness, desires to be devoted and obedient to God, and obtains a sense of being reborn, of peace joy and love, but this peace is not based on a sense of his own righteousness. No, man's peace and serenity is based on assurance of divine forgiveness in spite of his enduring sinfulness and also on the fact that Christ imputes his righteousness to the soul.

Niebuhr never develops in any of his writing just what this doctrine of imputed righteousness means to him. This is in itself significant and has given rise to the criticism that justification for him means only forgiveness.[11]

Niebuhr's doctrine is clearly an emphasis on justification as a reality that he sees simply from the level of religious and moral

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[10] *Ibid.* p. 110.

[11] "The attack from the right insists that Niebuhr overestimates forgiveness and under estimates fellowship; that he does not see that repentance, necessary though it is, is not the end but the means to the end. True, the broken heart is the only entrance to the kingdom, not alone at the beginning of the Christian pilgrimage, but every day, and as much at the end as at the beginning. Yet the nature of the kingdom is mutual love, between God and the soul, and between the soul and society; the agape fellowship is the end, forgiveness the means. Intentionally or not, Niebuhr leaves you with the reverse impression." D.W. Soper, *Major Voices in American Theology,* (Philadelphia: 1953) p. 40.

experience. Man must come to an understanding of his doctrine of new life by analizing his own brief statements on it, seeing how he approves and makes his own Luther's concepts of a new life — and then limiting or gaining more precision into Niebuhr's ideas by seeing what the new life *does not* mean for him. This is possible by reflecting on his criticism of Catholic and Protestant perfectionists. First of all the new self is an *experience.* Niebuhr rules out at the very start any attempt to grasp or understand the new self within the framework of metaphysics.[12] This is for him to forestall any genuine understanding of the doctrine of justification. This experience is one of *deliverance* from the tight oppressing chamber of egotism and includes an awareness on the part of the self that it now lives in and for others out of love for and loyalty to God as revealed in Christ. Through no powers of its own it is now aware that it desires to live in harmony with its fellows. Escaping the prison of self-centeredness the self is aware that it is now possessed by God, it is now possessed from beyond itself, and with this sense of possession comes one of fulfillment. The self *experiences* an accession of powers, of resources that can only come from God and that release it for loving the neighbour as Christ reveals its true norm of agape to be. But another harsh fact of *experience* forces us to qualify the assertion that the new self, possessed by God from beyond itself, experiencing the new life and a sense of self-fulfillment, is truly fulfilled. This harsh fact of experience is that, due to the sinful power of corruptive egotism, the self is the Christ of intention, rather than an actual achievement. "It is the self only by faith, in the sense that its dominant purpose and intention are set in the direction of Christ as the norm." [13] God in his mercy considers the perfections of Christ as those of the self and considers the self's aspirations for achievements.

So the experience of serenity, of love, joy and peace which is proper to the converted or justified self is based on a twofold fact.

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[12] Niebuhr constantly asserts that the use of metaphysical principles in seeking to understand Christian mysteries must end in robbing the mysteries of their transcendent character and reducing them to the level of philosophical truths.

[13] HD, p. 119.

1) The self *feels* that its new relation of love to God and fellowmen is not its own doing, is not the fruit of its own efforts, comes from beyond itself.

2) Not only is the self aware of this but also it is aware that its love of God and fellow — is a desire not an achievement — and that the merciful God accepts the desire for the deed.

One must do justice to the positive aspects of regeneration, and yet not obscure the realities of sin.[14]

What is our final word — "... Christ in us is not a possession, but a hope, that perfection is not a reality but an intention." [15] We can summarize what Niebuhr means by new life: we accept the fact that we are accepted although unacceptable.

Those who label Nibuhr as "neo-orthodox" are obviously referring to his return to the doctrine of the reformers, especially Luther. We have seen how sharp is the disagreement between Niebuhr and Luther regarding the preparation for justification. As to justification itself, Niebuhr fully approves Luther's emphasizing the grace of justification as primarily forgiveness.[16] But Luther (as Niebuhr understands him) also sees grace as a new life, as a power of righteousness. Luther interprets this new life psychologically. For him it is a motive of love and thanksgiving to God for a forgiveness that is utterly gratuitous.[18] The soul is filled with love, joy and peace realizing what Christ has done on its behalf. The soul experiences its new life as a deliverance which enables it to transcend petty concern over the approval or disapproval, the gratitude or ingratitude of the neighbour, and to places acts of agape. Yet the soul knows that its new life is not its own possession, but is merely imputed to it. And the soul realises that the works which flow from the new life do not produce a new righteousness. What primarily wins Niebuhr's approval is that for Luther

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[14] *ibid.*, pp. 118-119.
[15] *ibid.*, p. 130.
[16] *ibid.*, p. 194.
[17] *ibid.*, p. 193.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

1) grace is primarily forgiveness

2) the justified soul has a new life from which works of righteousness flow

3) but the new life is a "justitia aliena" and man is in no way justified by the works which follow this new life.[19]

When we consider Niebuhr's criticism of Catholic doctrine as he understands it, we get a more exact notion, via negationis, of what the new life of the self is not. Assertions by the Fathers or by Trent that nothing of sin remains in the baptized are simply evidence for Niebuhr of the power of human selfesteem to resist the truth of the gospel.[20] Catholics simply will not accept the fact that sin remains in the life of the redeemed, that grace is primarily forgiveness, and not merely for sins that are past; that grace is a having and a not having. When Catholic doctrine asserts that grace is a secure possession of the justified, it can only lead to a new complacency and a new self-righteousness.[21] Again Catholic doctrine errs when it claims the justified self can grow in grace and become ever holier.[22] This claim ignores the fact of the persistent power of self-love and the sinful corrupting nature of this self-love. The self-love in the life of the redeemed is not an incidental attitude, a mere venial sin; no, it involves a basic contradiction between the justified self and the will of God. The ultimate error in Catholic doctrine is the assertion that the new life can merit an increase of grace and eternal life. This is the very doctrine Paul strove to eradicate.[23]

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[19] *ibid.*, pp. 192-194.

[20] *ibid.*, pp. 131, 137.

[21] Niebuhr is convinced that any claim that grace is a created quality of itself permanently inherent in the soul, must destrory humility and lead to complacency and self-righteousness. "It must be regarded as inevitable that a religion that apprehends the truth about man and God by faith alone should be used as the instrument of human arrogance. This is done whenever the truth which is held by faith, because it is beyond all human attainment, comes to be regarded as a secure possession. In this form it is no longer a threat to man." HD, p.133.

[22] We have seen how he criticizes Augustine on just this point. See Chapter 2 and HD, pp. 140-141.

[23] "The final and symbolically most revealing form of this new Ca-

From Niebuhr's criticism of Catholic teaching we see that for him

1) The gift of new life does not eradicate sin.
2) It is not a secure possession.
3) It is not capable of growth or increase.
4) Merit is impossible.

Among some of the Protestant sects one sees the same error as that contained in Catholic teaching. For men such as John Wesley justification means forgiveness for sins that are past. Sanctification is the higher stage of redemption. Niebuhr sharply attacks the tendency in certain sectarians as well as in Catholicism to subordinate justification to sanctification.[24] What Niebuhr objects to is the false claim that even with grace the moral imperatives of the gospel can be realised. This is simply to deny the realities and limitations of historic existence. Wesley would assert that Christians are called to perfection in this life and can attain it.[25] Niebuhr objects that this is impossible. Certain commandments can not be kept. Above all the norm of agape is an impossible possibility. For Niebuhr must ever insist on the imperfections of the redeemed. Actually the word imperfection is too weak to convey his meaning. We have often seen him assert that the justified remains a sinner and for Niebuhr the formula means literally what it says. To talk about Christian perfection is only to pander to human pride and create intolerable illusions. The self-righteousness and fanaticism that on the part of both individuals and churches has so bedeviled

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tholic self-righteousness is the belief held in Catholic faith in the final judgement man is saved by merit;" HD, p. 145.

[24] "Sectarian perfectionism is constantly in peril of destroying the paradox of sanctification and justification in Biblical religion." ..."most sectarian perfectionists imagine that orthodox Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant, fail to achieve perfection only because they do not try hard enough or do not define perfection as the goal of the Christian life with sufficient rigour and consistency." HD, p. 147.

[25] "However, he (Wesley) regards justification in essentially Augustinian terms: as forgiveness for sins that are past; and he thinks of sanctification as the higher stage of redemption." HD, p. 180.

history is due to just such claims for a real sinlessness on the part of the redeemed. The only basis for a real humility is to acknowledge that perfection is not attainable in this life.[26]

We see from Niebuhr's critique of perfectionism (1) that justification can not be subordinated to sanctification; (2) it is an illusion to assert that all of the imperatives of the gospel can be kept, even by the justified; (3) claims to Christian perfection as an historical goal do not square with the facts of historic existence.

Anyone who consults the acts of the Council of Trent regarding the session on justification is impressed with the immense labour which the bishops and theologians undertook. In seven months the decree went through three revisions and as one sees in the acts, every paragraph, every sentence, indeed every word was considered, discussed and often changed. We can appreciate the difficulty of their task when we recall that before the time of the reformers the theologians (St. Thomas was an exception) had not treated the doctrine on justification separately but in very brief fashion in connection with the sacraments. And the magisterium which ordinarily responds to the erroneous teaching of heretics, had not had occasion to define precisely the questions raised by Luther and the other reformers. So there were no ready made answers at hand, especially no clear directives of the supreme teaching authority.

Moreover the Fathers were not simply interested in rejecting the assertions of the reformers. They took to heart the admonition of Cardinal Pole that they must not simply condemn a doctrine because it was taught by Luther. In fact as the opening section of the chapters on justification states, they set a high goal for themselves; "sacrosancta oecumenica et generalis Tridentina synodus . . . exponere intendit omnibus Christifidelibus veram sanamque doctrinam ipsius justificationis . . ."

In proposing the true and sound doctrine of justification,

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[26] In Wesley's famous debate with the Moravians, Niebuhr approves Wesley's taking seriously the moral imperatives of the gospel, but disapproves Wesley's assumption that they are fully realizable. "The one (Wesley) rightly maintains the moral imperatives of the gospel and wrongly imagines that they can be completely realised." HD, p. 182.

the Fathers continually sought to express the teaching on justification in the language of the bible or in the traditional language of the Fathers, especially of St. Augustine, they were conscious of their pastoral office and their responsibility to the faithful and they carefully avoided scholastic terminology. They expressly refrained from deciding on questions which were disputed by the schools.

All the Fathers saw that the basic differences between traditional Catholic doctrine and the teaching of the reformers centered on one point: Does God's justifying act in Christ produce a real enduring effect in the justified? And if so, what is the nature of this effect? — are sins really forgiven or are they retained — but no longer imputed? Does the justified have a justice which is truly his own, or is his justice a "justitia aliena?"

Luther's doctrine as clearly taught in his comments on the psalm miserere, was the following: "Deus vult peccata delere, quoad remissionem culpae, et ad ipsam vim peccati, non *quoad* rem, seu *naturam* peccati, nam vis peccati est accusare, damnare, mordere, laedere, non relinquere pacem cordi, objicere iratum Deum, infernum etc. Haec vis peccati, per misericordiam gratuitam tollitur, et *tamen manet verae hujus veneni reliquiae.* Ergo utrumque verum est, quod nullus christianus habet peccatum, et quod omnis christianus habet peccatum." [27]

Pope Leo X had already condemned a long list of statements extracted from Luther's writings in the bull Exsurge Domine, and among them "In puero post baptismum negare remanens peccatum, est Paulum et Christum simul conculcare.[28]

The Council of Trent in the fifth session already stated against Luther the following: "Si quis per Jesu Christi domini nostri gratiam, quae in baptismate confertur, reatum originalis peccati remitti negat, aut etiam asserit, non tolli totum id, quod veram et propriam peccati rationem habet, sed illud dicit tantum radi aut non imputari." A.S.[29] Thus the opposition between Luther and Trent is clear. For Luther in the justified the power of sin to condemn is taken away but the sin itself remains. For

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[27] WA, 40-2, p. 352.
[28] Denz. 1452.
[29] Denz. 1515.

Trent, in the justified nothing that has the true and proper nature of sin remains.

Niebuhr never explicitly accepts Luther's teaching that the power of sin to condemn is taken away, sin itself remaining in the justified.

But Niebuhr's constant teaching involves a very similar point of view. In his view the power of self-love, self-concern, anxiety, that is ever present in the justified is not only an inevitable source of sin but is in itself sinful since the norm of human nature is a completely selfless self-giving love, an agape whose norm is Christ.[30] Anything short of this norm is sinful. And so Niebuhr could not subscribe to Trent's formula "In renatis enim nihil odit Deus, quia nihil est damnationis iis, qui vere consepulti sunt cum Christo. . . ." [31]

Luther logically insisted that with the non-imputation of sins whatever justice man receives from the merciful God, it remains a justitia aliena. The Christian "est justus et sanctus aliena, seu extrinseca sanctitate. [. . .] est justus misericordia et gratia Dei. Haec misericordia et gratia non est aliquid humanum, non

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[30] We have already seen in many contexts how self love is simply sinful. See the section on Original Sin above, Chap. 1.

[31] Denz. 1515. In Niebuhr's writings one constantly finds such expressions as the following: "a certain persistence of the strategy of sin"; "sin which is never entirely overcome in any human heart"; "forgiveness cannot be merely for sins of the past"; "in every historic concretion there is an element of sinful self-realization;" In all of these instances Niebuhr is talking of the *justified* sinner. It is also quite obvious that he is speaking not merely of the *possibility* but of the *inevitability* of sin in the life of the redeemed. (HD, pp. 104, 109, 118). Niebuhr's reason why sin must be present (serious sin of course) in the life of the justified sinner never varies: so long as the self, individual or collective, remains within the tensions of history and is subject to the twofold condition of involvement in process and transcendence over it, it will be subject to the sin of overestimating its transcendence and of compounding its interests with those which are more inclusive." (HD, p. 128). Due to the way the self is structured and situated, one must concede that "the possibilities (real inevitabilities) of new evil can not be avoided by grace." And so sin in the justified, at least in the form of self love, is an ever present reality. Only the fact that God's forgiveness is ever at hand makes this bearable. Cf. HD, p. 128.

est habitus quidam aut qualitas in corde, sed est divinum beneficium, quod nobis donatur." [32]

In this passage Luther explicitly rejects the notion that grace is some quality or habit in the heart of man. Trent would surely agree that grace is not something human in the sense that man can merit it or that his nature can lay claim to it. Nor is it human in the sense that it elevates and divinizes man. But Luther means more than this. When he says grace is not something human he means that justification takes place outside of man. Considering such quotes as: "Propter Christum reputari nos justus." — "Aliena justitia omnes fiant justi" as Althaus says: "So ist die dem Sünder zuerkannte Gerechtigkeit, nicht eine ihm von sich aus eigene, sondern eine "fremde", eben die Jesus Christi;" [33]

Trent to the contrary teaches the gift of God merited by Christ and infused into the souls of the justified is something permanently adhering to the soul. All the Fathers agreed that grace of justification is not a transient act, as a momentary effect of God's justifying activity. Indeed as one sees the Fathers used expressions in their discussions emphasizing the habitualness or permanence of gratia justificians, such expressions as justitia inhaerens, gratia inhaerens, infusio gratiae, infusio justitiae. And in the wording of the decree itself it is clear that God's action in the justified produces an intrinsic and permanent change.[34] The justified is transferred into a state of grace and of the adoption of sons. From unjustified he become justified, from an enemy he is changed into a friend of God.[35] For Trent justification is not only the remission of sins (in the sense that all that has the true and proper notion of sin is taken away) but it means sancti-

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[32] WA 40-2, pp. 352-353.

[33] Paul Althaus, "Die Theologie Martin Luther's, pp. 197-198.

[34] The permanence of grace is clearly intended by the theologians and Fathers who use expressions like the following:
"infusio justitiae", CT, V, p. 279.
"infusio gratiae", *ibid.*, p. 279.
"justitiae habitualis", *ibid.*, p. 279.
"donum justitiae sec habitum," CT, V, p. 266.
"gratiam inhaerentem," CT, V, p. 337.

[35] Denz. 1528.

fication and renovation of the interior man. How is this brought about? When man voluntarily consents to the justifying action of God, he receives grace and gifts that produce a change in man, an interior change, from unjustified man becomes justified. From an enemy man is converted into a friend of God — man becomes finally an heir of eternal life — so profound is the change that occurs in the depths of the soul — of the sinner. The formal cause, the only formal cause of this change is the justice of God, not by which he is just, but by which he makes us just. Here the Council quotes directly from St. Augustine in the short phrase "...unica formalis causa est, justitia Dei, non qua ipse justus est, sed qua nos justos facit." [36]

For Cardinal Bellarmine this short phrase alone was enough to throw all of the errors of the reformers over board.[37]

This phrase is surely sufficient to meet with Niebuhr's disapproval, for Niebuhr sees only danger when grace becomes in any sense man's possession. Man can only be led to a new self-righteousness by such claims as Trent makes. For many of the Fathers at Trent the notion that man is justified by an extrinsic imputed justice that remains outside of him, man being sinner and justified, was as Catharinus said: an "in sanissima positio." [38] For Catharinus grace and mortal sin exclude one another as do death and life.[39] Soto agrees. Man cannot be a friend and an enemy of God at one and the same time. Moreover there is no place in scripture where man is called justified and unjustified at the same time and under the same aspect.[40]

Like his fellow-Dominican, Soto considers grace and sin to be contrary by an intrinsic formal reason — as diverse objects with respect to God.

Others in considering Luther's doctrine of justitia aliena said as did Bitunius that if Adam lost justice for himself and for us (reformers agreed on this) we must be much more ready, to

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[36] Denz. 1528, 1529.

[37] Bellarmine, De Justificatione, II, c.l.

[38] Comm. in omnes Divi Pauli Apostole et alias spetem canonicas epistolas, (Paris: 1566).

[39] *Ibid.*, p.

[40] Natura et Gratia, II, p. 109.

believe that through Christ we are truly justified, by a justitia inhaerens.[41] To deny this and to insist that after justification the justified are as much sinners as before justification is, as the general of the Carmelites said, to make Adam more powerful than Christ.[42]

Salmeron taught that for God to justify is to bestow justice and added that the scripture states that many (as Moses, David, Joseph) are said to be justified, not merely considered justified.[43]

On the question of justitia aliena Niebuhr seems to repeat Luther's doctrine without modifying it.

1) The justified self remains a sinner. So powerful and enduring is the corruptive force of self-love that even after being justified each man remains in contradiction to the will of God and will inevitably chose his own interest in preference to God.[44]

2) In what sense is man justified? Christ's merits and perfections are imputed to man, also man's desires to live in love are accepted as if they were actual. So God looks upon man as if man truly possessed all the merit, virtue and perfection of Christ. And God accepts man's intentions, as achievement. In this life man when justified desires to live in a subjection of love and obedience to God and in a harmony of selfless love with his neighbour. But this is not a historic possibility. And so grace is primarily forgiveness.[45]

3) Niebuhr then sees one must accept Luther's formula — man is simul justus et peccator — For Niebuhr this means man is as much in need of forgiveness at the end of his life as at the beginning. Man is truly justified with extrinsic im-

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[41] CT, V, p. 317.

[42] "Ita faciunt Adam efficaciorem sua pravitate nobis immissa ad maculanda opera, quam Christum sua justitia et gratia nobis donata ad opera purificanda et sanctificanda." CT, V, p. 376.

[43] "... quia multi dicuntur esse viri justi in scriptura, ut Joseph," CT, V, p. 266.

[44] HD, p. 118; pp. 144, 148.

[45] HD, p. 119; pp. 153-154.

puted justice. Man is truly a sinner since in action his enduring self-love inevitably betrays him into sin.[46]

So we see the basic opposition between Trent and Niebuhr. For Niebuhr the justified remains a sinner and there is always some basic contradiction between the will of the justified and the will of God.

For Trent nothing that has the true and proper nature of sin remains in the justified.

For Niebuhr man's justice is outside of him. Man is justified only to the extent that God imputes the merits of Christ to him, and accepts man's own desires for achievement.

According to Trent God's justifying action, merited by Christ, produces a justitia inhaerens in the soul of the justified.

The disagreement between Trent and Niebuhr about the new life or new self is not merely over words. The Christian man as Niebuhr describes him is one who accepts the crucifixion of desiring to serve God in Christ yet finds that each day, perhaps every hour his self-love betrays him into sin, making him an enemy of Christ who must ever return and daily seek forgiveness. The Christian is capable of moral progress. He can advance to ever higher levels of virtue. But the contradiction remains. The most virtous man will in some way manifest open rebellion against God. If holiness means essential conformity to the will of God, then the justified man must confess that holiness is not an historical possibility. It belongs to the realm of the "eschata." [47]

Trent serenely affirms that the justified sinner is already holy.[48] God's resources of love and mercy are not exhausted in forgiving the sinner who rebels. God's powerful creative love produces in the sinner the ability to respond to that love by bringing his will into harmony with that of God. More accura-

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[46] Niebuhr's acceptance of the statements of Schlatter (HD, p. 105) and Brunner (HD, p. 129) make it obvious that he accepts the "simuljustus" formula as they express it.

[47] We have seen countless statements of Niebuhr's arguments against what he calls perfectionism. To cite them again would be redundant.

[48] "Justificatio ipsa ... non est sola peccatorum remissio, sed et *sanctificatio* et *renovatio*..." CT, V, p. 793, cap. 7; Cf. Denz. 1528.

tely God creates that harmony of wills by infusing the gifts of grace and charity in the soul of the sinner[49] and by joining the justified sinner in a profound, mysterious union with his first-born, Jesus Christ.[50]

According to Trent the justified sinner is now a living member of Christ.[51] He rejoices in the presence of the Spirit of Christ in his soul. By the dynamic force of the union, through the active sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit, the justified sinner can and must grow day by day in holiness and enter more into the freedom of the sons of God.

Niebuhr sharply disagrees. Such perfectionist doctrines as that proposed by Trent are based on illusion. They breed only complacency and self-righteousness which when attacked becomes fanaticism. Perfectionists will ever ignore the *Persistence of sin in the life of the redeemed.* This is the theme which Niebuhr returns to again and again. He will not allow it to be overlooked or muted. It appears in almost every sermon and article, certainly in every book that he has written. It is the *leit-motive* of his theology. It alone can produce humility, tolerance, compassion.

We have already briefly indicated that the Fathers at Trent were well aware of the persistence of sin in the life of the justified.[52] The evidence of it was all around them. No one objected to Seripando's warning that the Fathers not exaggerate in speaking of the good works of Christians for which there was precious little evidence at the moment.[53] Indeed the most attention given to the advocates of the double justice theory was when they left its theoretical basis and made it a demand of practical piety.

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[49] "...caritas Dei diffunditur in cordibus eorum" ... *ibid.*, p. 793. cap. 7; Cf. Denz. 1530.

[50] "Unde in ipsa justificatione cum remissione peccatorum haec omnia simul infusa accipit homo per Jesum Christum, *cui inseritur*:"... *ibid.*

[51] "Nam fides, nisi adeam spes accedat et caritas, neque *unit perfecte cum Christo,* neque corporis ejus vivum membrum effict." *ibid.*, p. 793, cap. 7; Cf. Denz. 1531.

[52] See Section on double justice, above.

[53] CT, XII, p. 618.

> "Which of us would willingly stand before the Tribunal of God and seek admission to the Kingdom of Heaven, looking only to the justice of his own works?" [54]

No one desired to answer this question.

When Seripando outlined the dangers and obstacles which the justified must face he was presenting for the most part traditional Catholic doctrine. The Fathers had already formulated the reasons why concupiscence can be called sin: "because it originates in sin and leads to sin." [55] They saw concupscence as a tinder, an inflammable stuff needing only the spark of a suitable object to inflame it in pursuit of its own satisfaction indepenent, of often contrary to the good of reason and the demands of God. They were also aware that pride or self love is an even greater danger, an ever present corosrive force capable of insinuating itself into every good act.

In fact Niebuhr does Trent a serious injustice when he claims it does not take seriously the reality of sin in the life of the redeemed or when he asserts that a doctrine of sanctification such as Trent affirms leads only to complacency and self-righteousness.

The theologians and Fathers at Trent did take sin seriously. The very fact that the debate over a twofold justice was so extended and so intense was due in great part to the fact that those engaged in it saw the persistence of sin and self-love in the redeemed and realized how imperfect are the works of the justified and thus they saw the plausibility and even the attractiveness of Seripando's theory.

The Franciscan theologian, Richard Cenomanus was not a follower of the double justice theory, yet he could write the following: "If a man were to appear before the tribunal of Christ and look principally to his good works rather than grace, he would hardly differ from the Pharisee who trusted exceedingly in himself." [56]

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[54] CT, V, p. 486.
[55] CT, V, p. 239-40, cap. 4; Cf. Denz. 1515.
[56] CT, V, p. 536.

The Spanish secular, Peter Sarra expressed even stronger reservations about good works. There is a defect even in our most perfect acts, even in those placed under the impulse of grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.[57]

The theologians and Fathers often cited a well known question placed by St. Augustine: "Quis potest dicere: Mundum est cor meum?" [58]

The Augustinian Gregory Perfectus asked: "Quis scit, se fecisse omnia cum debitis circumstantiis, quae praecipit Deus?" [59]

The Conucil of Trent does take sin seriously when (*a*) it reminds the faithful that grace and inherent justice are lost by each mortal sin; (*b*) it teaches that without a special privilege from God no one can avoid daily falling into venial sin; [61] Niebuhr could scarcely discover the seeds of self-righteousness and complacency in a doctrine which affirms (*a*) the necessity of the just man's striving daily to grow in grace and charity; [62] (*b*) teaches that the justified need a special grace of God to maintain and increase justice received; [63] (*c*) reminds man that the Christian life is a constant struggle which should arouse sentiments of fear in the hearts of the just: "Formidare debent, scientes, quod in spem gloriae et nondum in gloria renati sunt, de pugna,

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[57] CT, V, p. 548.

[58] Migne 44, 309, cited in CT, V, p. 562.

[59] CT, V, p. 580.

[60] ..."non modo infidelitate, per quam et ipsa fides amittitur, sed etiam quocumque alio mortali peccato, quamvis non amittatur fides, acceptam justificationis gratiam amitti. CT, V, p. 796, cap. 15; *Cf.* Denz. 1544.

[61] "Si quis hominem semel justificatum dixerit amplius peccare non posse, neque gratiam amittere, atque ideo cum, qui labitur et peccat, numquam vere fuisse justificatum; aut contra, posse in tota vita peccata omnia, etiam venialia vitare, nisi ex speciali Dei privlegio, quemadmodum de Beata Virgine tenet ecclesia: anathema sit. CT, V, p. 799. Canon 23; Cf. Denz. 1573.

[62] All of the theologians and Fathers stressed this fact when treating the second state: "Quo fit, ut justi ipsi eo magis se obligatos ad ambulandum in via justitiae sentire debeant"... CT, V, p. 795, cap. 11; Cf. Denz. 1537.

[63] "Si quis dixerit, justificatum vel sine speciali auxilio Dei in accepta justitia perseverare posse, vel cum eo non posse: anathema sit. CT, V, p. 799, canon 22; Denz. 1572.

quae superest cum carne, cum mundo, cum diabolo, in qua victores esse non possunt, nisi cum Dei gratia apostolo obtemperent dicenti: 'Debitores sumus non carni, ut secundum carnem vivamus.' " [64] (*d*) denys to the Christian any strict certainty of being in the state of grace.[65] (*e*) states that final perseverance is a gift which man can only obtain by humble perseverance in prayer.[66]

Certainly the Fathers at Trent were aware of the obstacles and dangers that threaten the justified. Yet they could maintain that the justified sinner was holy and capable of growth in holiness. How was this possible? Trent sought to be true to the facts of moral experience, all the facts. Whether St. Paul in Romans 7 is writing of the moral experience of the sinner *before* justification or whether he describes the experience of the justified sinner remains in dispute. But no one contests the fact that in Romans 8 Paul considers the moral experience of the just man, now a living member of Christ and dynamically touched by the Spirit of Christ. Trent was compelled to hold in tension: (1) the fact of obstacles which ever threaten the continued existence and development of the new life; (2) the fact so clearly affirmed by St. Paul as also a *part of Christian experience* that the just man is already holy and can daily advance in holiness.

In his famous study on Protestantism Bouyer makes a most pertinent observation: :No modern exegete with any degree of objectivity, whether Protestant, Catholic or free thinker, fails to recognise that the thought of St. Paul on justification, in all its complexity, exacts equal attention to the seventh chapter of the epistle to the Romans, in its description of fallen man, and the eighth which describes the action of the Holy Spirit in man raised up by grace." [67]

A well known Protestant exegete, F. Leenhardt, in opposition to traditional Protestant exegesis, has strongly expressed his opinion that the action of the Holy Spirit is absent from the drama of the man who speaks in Romans 7, and that the same Holy Spirit is dynamically present in Chapter 8.[68]

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[64] CT, V, p. 796, cap. 13; Denz. 1541.
[65] *Ibid.*, cap. 9; Denz. 1533.
[66] *ibid.*, cap. 13; Denz. 1541, Denz. 1566.
[67] L. Bouyer, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
[68] Leenhardt, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 194.

C.H. Dodd in his well known commentary on Romans makes it clear that justification is not simply ordered to forgiveness of sin but to "liberty and life through the Spirit." [69]

What does the action of the Holy Spirit in the justified sinner produce? In the first verse of Romans 8 St. Paul says: "There is no doom now for those who are in Christ Jesus;" implicit in this statement (as Dodd says) is the declaration by St. Paul of "a real liberation from the present power of sin." Just as sin's law brought death, so the law of the Spirit brings life, as sin's law made man prisoner, the law of the Spirit has set him free. (8, v. 2-5).

In versus 5 ÷ 7 St. Paul shows the antithesis between life in the spirit and life in the flesh.

"For those who follow the flesh have their interests in the flesh,
And those who follow the Spirit have their interests in the Spirit.
The interests of the flesh mean death,
The interests of the Spirit mean life and peace."

The conclusion each Christian must draw from this is clear (V 12, 13) "It is not to live by the flesh! If you live by the flesh, you are on the road to death; but if by the Spirit you put the actions of the body to death, you will live." [70]

As Cardinal Newman says, commenting on the first verses of Romans 8: "Can words be stronger to prove that the righteousness of the law is not abolished under the Gospel, is not fulfilled by Christ only, but by Him as the firsts fruits of many brethren . . ." [71]

The Fathers were able to recognize honestly the power of concupisence, the persistent pride and self love, the inevitability of venial sin and the ever present danger of mortal sin in the life of the redeemed. How could they in the face of these facts

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[69] C.H. Dodd, *"Epistle of Paul to the Romans,"* (London: 1959) pp. 136 ff.

[70] C.H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.

[71] J.H. Newman, *Lectures on Justification*, (London: 1874) p. 47.

assert that the justified man is holy and grows daily in holiness? Simply because they wished to affirm (as does St. Paul in Romans 8) that the union between Christ and the just man is not a fiction nor a static relation between exemplar and image but a living, life-giving dynamic union between the risen triumphant Christ and the justified sinner. This union will not be sterile. The just man by prayer, good works and the sacraments will grow evermore to resemble Christ, his head. Cooperating with the liberating power of the Spirit of Christ he will bring concupiscence more and more under the service of reason and even the intractable stuff of pride and self-love must gradually yield to the man who generously cooperates with the Holy Spirit and the rich abundance of graces He bestows on the justified.

Some critics suggest that Niebuhr overlooks or does not fully develop the positive riches of grace and they add that he does not present adequately the implications of the "new man in Christ." His doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of the Church could also be more adequately developed.[72] All such assertions are masterpieces of understatement. The attentive listener hears the thunder of prophetic warning whenever Niebuhr speaks of sin or of the inevitable corruption of the good deeds of the redeemed. But this same voice is reduced to an uncertain whisper whenever Niebuhr speaks of the influence of grace in the life of the redeemed. The same critics who recognize that Niebuhr's Christology is perhaps truncated and admit that his silence regarding the Holy Spirit and the Church is disconcerting hasten to add that these are defects or omissions that he will certainly remedy in the future.[73] They fail to realise that Niebuhr's silence on these points is not an omission which he can and will correct in the future but the logical consequences of the basic dominant themes of his theology.

Trent can affirm the reality of the union between Christ and the just man and describe some of the life-giving activities of the Spirit of Christ in the hearts of the justified since it presupposes as true: 1) the creed formulated at Nicea which confesses one God in three Divine Persons; 2) the formulas of Chalcedon

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[72] See R.H. King, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85, for a list of such statements.
[73] G. Harland, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

which state that the second Person of the Trinity assumed a human nature into the unity of His Person; 3) St. Paul's parallel between Adam and Christ. Trent states that just as all men would not be born unjust unless they took physical descent from Adam — for through him they contract injustice which is yet properly their own — so if they were not reborn in Christ — through grace merited by his passion and communicated to them —, they would never be justified. Justification is the process that transfers man from the state of sons of the first Adam into the state of grace and adoption of sons.[74]

The Fathers at Trent, believing in Christ as God and Man, accepting the real parallel between Adam and Christ and hence the real solidarity of all men with Adam and with Christ, were able to express again the truth which the New Testament expresses in so many ways: the unique, ineffable, dynamic union that exists between the risen Christ and the justified sinner; the continuous operation of the Spirit of Christ in the souls of the redeemed.

As we have seen Seripando gave the occasion for this by his impressive arguments that the justice of any man is so defective that a new application of the justice of Christ is needed else even the just man at the end of his life could be condemned.[75] In reply his opponents stressed the power and intimacy of the union between Christ and the just man.

The Spanish theologian Miranda used a series of metaphors to describe the union. How is the justified sinner related to Christ? As the branch to the vine, as the river to its source, as the light of the air to the light of the sun, so is the just man linked to Christ. And whatever good works the just man performs are done under the influence or impulse of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ.[76]

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[74] "Nam sicut revera homines, nisi ex semine adae propagati nascerentur, non nascerentur in justi, cum ea propagatione per ipsum, dum concipiuntur, propriam injustitiam contrahant: ita nisi in Christo renascerentur, numquam justificarentur cum ea renascentia per meritum passionis ejus gratia, qua jusi fiunt, illis tribuatur." CT, V, Cap. 3, p. 792; Denz. 1523.

[75] See section on twofold justice.

[76] CT, V, p. 550 (See above in section on double justice).

The Italian, Jacomelli, insisted that the just man can stand before the Tribunal of Christ without fear, since he is "bound, linked, joined to Christ." [77]

The great Spanish Dominican Soto acknowledging that our justice or grace is certainly imperfect in comparison with that of Christ; as the light of the air is imperfect in comparison with that of the sun, so is our grace imperfect in relation to Christ's. Yet because Christ is our head and we are his members, we are still, because of this, beloved sons of God.[78]

Niebuhr's doctrine scarcely permits him to speak of an effective union between Christ and the just man or to describe the operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the redeemed:

1) While Niebuhr never denies the doctrine of the Trinity, there is no need for him to do so: "It is not possible to state the truth about God, as known from the standpoint of Christian faith, except in trinitarian terms. God was revealed in Christ in actual history. The Second Person of the Trinity thus defines *that aspect of the divine power* which is engaged in history, and which is known primarily by faith." [...] "In the same manner the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, is important. If we would understand that *all forms of holiness and all signs of redemption* in actual history are not merely extensions of human wisdom or human virtue but are the consequence of a radical breakthrough of the divine spirit through human self sufficiency. *Without relating these manifestations to God's nature,* Christian faith degenerates into a shallow spiritualism." [79] It is difficult to escape the conclusion that for Niebuhr the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity are simply aspects or modes of the Divine Power operating in history.

2) Niebuhr flatly rejects the formulas of Chalcedon. They verge on logical nonsense and they have no religious or moral meaning. The Jesus of history can not be God incarnate but a

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[77] CT, XII, pp. 712-713.
[78] Natura et Gratia, II, 115.
[79] FH, pp. 167-168.

man who by his self sacrificing death on the Cross is both the most adequate symbol of Divine Love and the most perfect expression of human love.[80]

3) He retains the comparison between Christ and Adam at the level of symbolic representation. The first Adam has meaning not as the father of the human race nor as the source of sin for all of his descendants but as a symbol representing what is true of all men: like Adam all men live a life of self-centerdness in defiance of the demands of their authentic self: a life of Agape. Christ as the second Adam exists as a symbol or better as an exemplar and norm for all men. His death on the cross manifests that a life of self-sacrificing love is the only adequate way in which human freedom can develop. Just as Adam was not an historical person nor the father of the human race but a convenient symbol to represent man's alienation from his essential self, so Christ (though Niebuhr never denies his existence) plays a parallel role: expressing human love at its highest level. Christ alone among men was able to manifest what should be true of all men if they were to live according to their essential self. His life of Agape is thus the *norm* of human nature as well as the symbol of Divine Agape.[81]

We have already noted that a great amount of ambiguity surrounds Niebuhr's statements concerning Christ. He refers to the Christ as the Son of God. He insists that the statement "The Word was made flesh" is the truth. Yet the man Jesus, while symbolizing Divine Agape and reaching the highest level of human love, is clearly only a man since he is neither exempt from sin nor from error. And Niebuhr has serious doubts about the resurrection of Jesus as an historical fact. There is definite equivocation.

Yet even if we decide that Niebuhr does affirm the divinity of Christ we are faced with an awkward conclusion: Niebuhr preaches a strangely inactive Christ.

Niebuhr insists that it is Pauline Christianity which he desires to proclaim and yet he makes no mention of the union bet-

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[80] See Section on Niebuhr's Christology.

[81] See Sections on Original Sin and Christology above.

ween the risen Christ and the justified sinner. Nor does he refer to the active dynamic influence of the living Lord on the souls of the redeemed.

The sinner does encounter God in Christ. For the event of the crucifixion reveals how sin calls down the rigour of God's just judgement and the Cross at the same time reveals the mercy of God triumphing over his justice, as God takes the evil of sin into Himself and manifests forgiveness to the sinner. But the role of Christ in this encounter is one of symbol. From what happens to Christ we are led to certain conclusions about the nature of God: God is both just and merciful and His mercy triumphs over His justice in a way anticipated by no one.

Christ as symbol, Christ as norm. When one considers the role which Niebuhr assigns to Christ, one is compelled to say that Niebuhr is not speaking of a living active concrete person but of an abstraction, a platonic ideal. Plato urged men to turn from the shadows manifested by sense impressions to the contemplation of clear intelligible realities in a world of ideas where man could apprehend absolute justice, absolute beauty. Niebuhr adds to this world the idea of Agape, absolute disinterested love.

It is a genuine anomaly that Niebuhr who has been so strongly influenced by the personalism of Buber and Brunner and who himself uses "I" and "Thou" language at times,[82] finds no place for this language when speaking of Christ and the justified sinner. But actually the anomaly disappears when one recalls that men can not enter into personal relations of faith, trust and love with an abstraction, a symbol of a transcendent norm. Yet this is all that Christ is in the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr.

Because of the strange inactive role of Christ and due to the absence of the Holy Spirit from Niebuhr's doctrine of justification, one can understand how certain writers have recently begun to apply terms like Deism and Pelagianism to Niebuhr's theological statements.

A recent widely discussed and very controversial work of this kind is the book of R.H. King. As King interprets Niebuhr she builds an argument with the following steps: The Holy Spirit

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[82] See HN, pp. 139, 143.

is of no importance in Niebuhr's theology. Why is this possible? It is not a mere omission. Since the Holy Spirit is that aspect of the divine activity that enters the world and establishes personal relations with men by direct influence on their lives, since Niebuhr led by an excessive regard for the authority of positive science considers creation as a closed system not open to divine intervention, it necessarily follows that there is no role for the Holy Spirit in Niebuhr's theology and the God of Niebuhr (one who does not break the creation barrier) is very close to that of the 18th century group called Deists.[83]

Professor Henry Wieman, a religious naturalist, comes to a very similar conclusion. Pondering statements like the following: "When man confronts the Cross he experiences the mercy and new life which *flows from* true repentance". Wieman concludes that for Niebuhr God's grace to an individual "is equated with the psychological effects of holding certain beliefs." [84]

Niebuhr's peculiar doctrine of "common grace" seems to strengthen the position of those critics who are uncertain whether he believes in grace at all.

It is ironic that Niebuhr can rebuke St. Thomas for placing God's saving activity and human cooperation on the same level and yet he himself introduces a reality he calls common grace which he seems to place very much on the same level as saving grace.

Saving grace for Niebuhr would clearly be something very close to what post-Tridentine theology has called actual grace. For Niebuhr this saving grace is "an accretion of power to the will," which is the result of "the soul's intimate relation with the divine source." [85]

What then is common grace? It would not be accurate to think of it as grace given by God to man apart from any conscious relationship of man to Christ as his Redeemer and Lord. Niebuhr would call such grace "hidden grace". Speaking of the process of conversion whereby man turns away from sin Niebuhr says one must not assume that such an experience is possible

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[83] *Op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.
[84] *Op. cit.*, p. 347.
[85] PSA, p. 106.

only for those who know Christ in the actual historical revelation. "A" hidden Christ operates in history. And there is always the possibility that those who do not know the historical revelation may achieve a more genuine repentance and humility than those who do." [86]

Common grace is something else again. Niebuhr comes close to a definition of it in the following passage: "Grace, whether 'common' or 'saving', has meaning only when life is measured at the limits of human possibilities and it is recognized that there are things we ought to do which we can not do merely by the strength of our willing but which may become possible because we are assisted by the help which others give us by their love, by the strength which accrues to our will in moments of crisis, and by the Saving Grace of the Spirit of God indwelling our spirit." [87] So common grace raises man above the limits of human possibility. It consists of the "help which others give us by their love, by the strength which accrues to our will in moments of crisis."

What Niebuhr means by common grace is clearly part of common experience. Everyone is aware of the strength and motivation which the love of a truly devoted woman can mean to a man. Not only psychiatrists but all who are even moderately reflective realize how disastrous can be the effect (on children especially) when this love is withdrawn. Everyone is also aware that in moments of crisis (e.g. a warrior in battle, a mother whose children are in danger, a student or writer facing an important dead line) an individual can experience a momentary heightening of his intellectual and physical powers. No one would dispute this. But one might well question whether Niebuhr's decision to apply the term grace to this natural experience is very helpful since throughout his writings Niebuhr says so little about saving grace and since he appears to grant equal importance to common and saving grace. From the passage cited above one concludes that common and saving grace are quite similar. Both involve merely a heightening of man's powers. Their origin may not be the same but their nature is.

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[86] HD, p. 113, Note 3.
[87] CRPP, p. 146.

Writing in another context Niebuhr seems to strengthen the impression that common grace and saving grace are not essentially different." Grace is an accretion of power to the will. Saving grace *may be* the fruit of the soul's intimate relation with the divine source. There is no doctrine which can guarantee such power. Perhaps it would be well as both Christians and Jews, to acknowledge that modern psychiatry and the social sciences have validated the efficacy of "common grace" more explicitly than any saving grace which we may claim as religious people."[88] Here Niebuhr makes the incredible statement that while modern medicine and social sciences have validated the efficacy of common grace (he means that these disciplines have shown conclusively how the love of another or the demands of a situation can mean an accretion of power to the will), Christianity has not been so successful in pointing to experiences where the efficacy of "saving grace" is unambiguously demonstrated.

Niebuhr's concept of common grace raises a battery of problems. We have mentioned it here only by way of showing how Niebuhr's statements on grace only strengthen the claims of those who would make him a religious naturalist or who would insist that his God, does not, indeed can not break the creation barrier and thus intervene directly in the lives of men.

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[88] PSA, p. 106.

# CONCLUSION

Courageous and consistent have been Niebuhr's efforts to make the gospel relevant to modern man. Niebuhr has been tireless in seeking to relate Christian truth to the insights of philosophy, psychology and social sciences. It is obvious that he has never been tempted to the cultural obscurantism that tends to be true of fundamentalism and orthodox Protestantism. He is thoroughly at home in the disciplines of modern culture.

No one can find fault in Niebuhr's understanding of modern man. But in seeking to confront modern man with the truths of Christianity has Niebuhr been faithful in presenting all the truths of Christianity? To the most causal reader of his major writings, Niebuhr's Christianity appears as a personal reconstruction. It is a reconstruction centering around two insights, both pertaining to man. Man's precarious existence (as creature and as imago Dei), his situation as being immersed in natural process and yet transcending it, inevitably betray him into sin. But sin no matter how long it endures, within a individual life or the history of the race, can never destroy the self in its radical freedom nor still its demands for a life of self giving agape as the only mode of existence adequate to the dimensions of the transcendent self.

These are the two foundations on which not only Niebuhr's anthropology and ethic but his theology are constructed.

Because of the structure of the human self, due to the perversity of human freedom, man's actions will ever betray his ideals. When one places man's perversity alongside his norm one sees what an immense gulf or chasm separates the two. Man the inevitable rebel against God — a completely selfless — disinterested love which is not merely a counsel or ideal but man's norm. The mind grows giddy at the depth of the abyss that separates these two. Yet this is the inevitable conclusion of

Niebuhr's thought. Keeping these two facts in mind we can appreciate the full force of Niebuhr's statements — agape is an impossible possibility — man's existence, the Christian's existence, is tragic.

For Niebuhr the depth and persistency of man's sin is not merely a fact that experience reveals but a metaphysical principle — without it man ceases to be man.

Not even God can overcome this contradiction. God can forgive man's constant rebellion and frantic effort to establish himself at the center of existence — but even the grace of God is powerless to remove this force of self love from man's heart or to so enrich and elevate man that he can live a life of genuine love.

When we add to this infinite distance between a perverse human freedom and its norm of agape the strange role of Christ and the puzzling absence of the Holy Spirit, we are almost compelled to say that if we accept Niebuhr's premises, justification can only mean forgiveness; to speak of Christian perfection is a cruel deception, the life of a Christian is truly tragic.

Niebuhr's statements about the depth and persistence of human sin may be understandable as a corrective of a liberal theology so influenced by science and so infected by 19th century optimism that it too easily identified sin with ignorance and was too sanguine in its claims that extending and improving education would lead to the elimination of sin.

Niebuhr's *rigour* in defining the agape which Christians must live by as a utterly selfless disinterested love, a love that apart from Christ is not historically realizable, may also be understandable as a reaction to a sentimental strain in American Protestantism and especially in the social gospel whose adherents were unrealistic in hailing the triumph of agape in the lives of individuals and in society.

But are Niebuhr's basic themes truly biblical Pauline themes? There is simply no room in Niebuhr's thought for St. Paul's description of the freedom of the sons of God.

St. Paul's hymn to charity — as a more excellent way — is not sufficiently dialectical for Niebuhr.

Most serious of all, most un-Pauline is his role for the risen

Christ and the relation which Niebuhr indicates as proper to Christian and the risen Lord.

Man in Niebuhr's theology is strangly alone.

There is a strong tendency in Niebuhr, as someone has remarked, to go the limits with an idea. In comparison the teachings of the Council of Trent may seem flat and unexciting. But Trent sought to present the whole complex experience of justification. Thus Trent was led to long, often tedious consideration of the role of faith, its nature, its relation to the other dispositions, the relation of the justice of Christ to the justice of the justified sinner, the role of works as they precede and then follow justification, but the result is a marvelously balanced account of divine initiative and human cooperation in the various moments of the process called justification.

Niebuhr as we have often noted is highly selective in describing the experience of the adult sinner. Niebuhr's account seems strangely truncated and he omits a battery of problems.

The most striking contrast between Trent and Niebuhr appears when one studies the position of Christ in their doctrines of justification. Trent was drawn by the double justice controversy to place new emphasis on Christ as the center, not only as suffering and dying, but as the risen active Lord — to whom the justified sinner is joined in a most intimate life giving union.

Christ may be the center of Niebuhr's doctrine but he is a strangely inert and inactive Christ, who is ever tending to disappear or to become a symbol and a norm.

In considering the steps or dispositions that lead to justification, Niebuhr's doctrine of the basic and enduring nature of human freedom leads him to affirm (despite his reformation heritage) that man can and must cooperate in the process of justification. In affirming the necessity for man's cooperation and in describing its manner Niebuhr takes a position that is very close to that of Trent. This is especially true of the position or role that he assigns to faith. Niebuhr retains the terminology of justification by faith but emphasis on faith as trusting surrender to the merciful God is replaced by the role it has at Trent, a unique means of access to truths that God alone possesses.

Niebuhr stresses the role of faith as enabling man to see certain events in history as God's saving acts culminating in the Cross of Christ.

A Catholic theologian would certainly approve Niebuhr's stressing the cognitive role of faith and his use of faith in a way that does not exclude but rather includes and is intimately related to other dispositions such as hope, fear, especially sorrow for sin.

The basis for the agreement between Trent and Niebuhr regarding the need and manner of man's cooperation with God's justifying activity is the doctrine of potentia obedientialis. What Trent assumes, Niebuhr clearly expresses: man in his transcendent freedom is open to the elevating, divinizing action of God. Yet Niebuhr would immediately qualify and circumscribe this openess. Not even God can actually heal the contradiction in the human heart. Human self love is so persistent, so corruptive — that serious sin and contradiction of God will ever endure even among the justified. Justification is primarily forgiveness and sanctification is not a goal within the realm of history.

Trent and Catholic theology today would insist that Niebuhr creates immense difficulties by not distinguishing between mortal and venial sin and by failing to grasp that there are various kinds of self love.

The most enthusiastic among Niebuhr's supporters will admit that his impressively developed and subtle study of sin and self love only emphasize the poverty and incompleteness of his description of the new life in and with Christ and the Church.

This fact only heightens the impression that Niebuhr's theology is a very personal reconstruction. Starting with a concept of man as sinner which he believes to be present in the bible, Niebuhr makes all of the other biblical affirmations serve this one insight. Herein lies his strength and his weakness. While Niebuhr can write with great force and energy about the nature and extent of sin and can unmask self love in all its forms, he can not convince his reader that a doctrine where the risen triumphant Christ is reduced to the role of symbol or norm, where no mention of the efficacy of the Holy Spirit as sanctifier is found, where man's freedom can only be a sinful freedom, is the biblical Christianity it claims to be.

# APPENDIX

## *ANTINOMIES IN THE THOUGHT OF REINHOLD NIEBUHR*

### ANTINOMY I

The first antinomy we can consider is the fact that while Niebuhr has in general a hostile attitude toward philosophy and especially toward any effort of philosophy to assist faith in obtaining some understanding of the Christian mysteries, yet he himself uses philosophy in constructing his own theology.

Take the example of Niebuhr's anthropology. He claims to present a biblical concept of man. But self-transcendence, the nature and source of individuation, the relation of the self to reason, the various activities of the self, in memory, foresight, imagination, his detailed analysis of human freedom, for all this Niebuhr uses common human experience — and the facts of his own intense effort at introspection — and he submits all this data to rational analysis. This is clearly a work of philosophy. This is so obvious that one finds it incredible that Niebuhr can say that the Christian view of man is endangered when rationally explicated. The whole effort of the first chapters of his great work on human nature and human destiny is to do just that.

## ANTINOMY II

Certainly a Thomist [1] would readly agree with many of Niebuhr's conclusions concerning man. For example a Thomist would approuve:

*a*) Niebuhr's rejection of Platonic dualism and every philosophical anthropology which obscures man's dimensions or threatens his unity.

*b*) His strong affirmation of man's unity. The image of God in man (his transcendent spirit) and his creaturliness (his characteristics as body) are truly one.

*c*) Niebuhr's insistence that man is good despite his finiteness.

*d*) His rejection of any explanation of human evil that places its origin outside of man.

*e*) His careful impressive analysis of the meaning of human self-transcedence as the basis of a radical freedom and as compelling man (cor inquietum) to face the encounter with God.

The Thomist would readly accept these statements for he accepts the Old Testament portrayal of man as being God's revealing word to man regarding human nature.

What the Thomist would object to in the strongest possible terms is Niebuhr's statement that the "Christian view of man is endangered when rationally explicated." For what Niebuhr is saying is that the conclusions which he finds in the bible concerning man (man is substantially one, radically free, responsible for his actions) are truths which are not accessible to philosophy. One must admit that many philosophers have neither understood

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[1] We are heavily indebted to E. Gilson. "Elements of Christian Philosophy," pp. 203 ff; "The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy," p. 168 ff. For the treatment of Plato, Aristotle and St. Thomas which follows.

nor demonstrated man's substantial unity; one may readily concede the advantage which only Christian philosophers have of working under the guidance of revelation but one must also insist that many of the truths which Niebuhr claims are only accessible to faith can also be demonstrated by philosophical reason.

Consider for example the substantial unity of man. For Niebuhr the mystery of man centers around two facts: man is a child of nature, man is a spirit. As immersed in natural process man is sharply circumscribed, finite dependent, but man is also a transcendent spirit, radically free, with unlimited possibilities. Man is bound, man is free, man is limited, man is unlimited, man is determined, man is undetermined. One is forced to admit that human nature reveals aspects or characteristics which should exclude one another and yet which must be held together for man is a unity as both the bible and experience clearly affirm. One must conclude that man is a paradox and the fact of his unity is a mystery which reason can in no way fathom and which faith must simply affirm.

The Thomist agrees that man is essentially one but he takes exception to Niebuhr on many counts. He is first of all a bit puzzled and disappointed that Niebuhr, who is familiar with St. Thomas's thought on many other subjects (Original Justice, Original Sin) never mentions St. Thomas' attempt to give a philosophical solution to the problem of man's unity.

But more important, the Thomist insists that St. Thomas has given, in terms of a metaphysic of existence an answer that is an intelligible explanation of how matter and spirit are one.

From the time of the apostolic fathers the Christian theologian was concerned to (*a*) preserve the independence of the soul and its ability to survive the dissolution of its union with the body which death entails; (*b*) explain in a convincing way the fact that the body was so intimately united with the soul that it was at least fitting that the body be resuscitated and rejoined to the soul.

Early Christian writers found a natural ally in Plato when it was a question of manifesting the soul's independence and immortality. But accepting Plato's arguments had serious difficulties. Plato has no problems about explaining the unity of man. Man is simply a soul using a body to which it is only

accidentally united as the pilot to his ship and from which the soul ever seeks to free itself. This theory can well account for the soul's immortality and spirituality but it simply denies what the bible affirms, man as an essential unity, and it removes all reason why man should look to the resurrection of the body.

The philosophy of Aristotle on the other hand was well suited to meet the demands of both experience and revelation that man is substantially one. In the philosophy of Aristotle every material being is a composite whose essence is made up of a potential limiting principle, matter, and an actual perfecting principle called form which orders and determines the matter to which it is united. This composition is true also of organic beings. Within the order of living beings it is the vital principle or soul which as form is the act of an organized body which it orders and vivifies and to which it is united to form the essence of the living being. Man is simply one example, in the order of organic beings, of this essential union of a material and formal principle.

Aristotle could furnish arguments for the substantial unity of man for the fittingness of the resurrection but there seemed to be no basis in Aristotle's philosophy for the soul's immortality.

This was the difficulty that faced St. Thomas and his contemporaries. Plato would safeguard the spirituality and immortality of the soul but in the process man disappears. Aristotle shows convincingly that man is a unity of essence but he is unable to justify the soul's survival of the dissolution of the composite.

St. Thomas was able to give a solution to the problem which did not involve a mere electic borrowing from Plato and Aristotle and in which he really moved beyond the position of both.

St. Thomas' solution was to see the soul as an intellectual substance which was by that very fact also the form of the human composite. From the fact of conceptual knowledge one concludes that the soul is intellectual and from the fact that the soul performs its operation of conceptual knowledge independently of the body one concludes that it possesses existence independent of the body. It is a substance.

But this intellectual substance is also the form of the body for it's role in the human body is that of the form in any composite essence. For as the form of any organic being organizes, vivifies and gives existence to the material principle to which it is united; so the intellectual substance, the human soul, organizes and vivifies the body and communicates to it its' own "esse" or act of being and is truly the form of the human composite. The human soul and body are truly one, not by accidental composition or by simple contiguity but there union is the most profound and intimate: both are actuated by the same "esse" or act of being which is proper to the intellectual substance, the soul and is communicated to the body which participates in this perfection of the form. Since a thing is one to the extent that it is, and since the human composite has but one esse or act of being, it follows that the human composite is truly one.

This explanation of St. Thomas, which we reproduce in very summary fashion, removes the unity of man from the realm of theological mysteries and makes it understandable. Man is composed of contrary qualities and he will experience tension and conflict but these contraries do not put man's experience of unity in jeopardy. Niebuhr's oft repeated assertions that man is a paradox or that contradiction is at the very heart of human nature may be acceptable as rhetorical devices. But man experiences himself as a unity and the account of St. Thomas makes this experience intelligible.

## ANTINOMY III

Niebuhr is determined to preserve the gratuitous nature of justification and to maintain the true meaning of grace as a gift to which man is in no way entitled. This is quite to be expected from any one who preaches justification by faith. Catholics who encounter the thought of Martin Luther for the first time would find his statements far less baffling if they kept in mind that the decisive experience of Luther's life was the "Turmerlebnis" where he first realized the absolute surpassing gratuity of the saving justice of God. It was in order to maintain and communicate this insight that Luther insisted on man's total sinfulness, his lack of free will in the order of salvation, his utter passivity in the entire process of justification, the worthlessness of works, the absolute sufficiency of faith alone. Nothing must cast the slightest doubt on the complete gratuity of the justification of the sinner. We have seen above that Niebuhr is reluctant to follow Luther whenever the latter seems to deny or circumscribe man's freedom. But Niebuhr also teaches justification by faith and so he also stresses the gratuitiousness of justification although not in the radical manner of Luther. There is nothing surprising about this. But it is just at this point that a great difficulty appears and we seem to be faced with another of Niebuhr's antinomies.

For the same Niebuhr who affirms that justification and the faith that enables man to accept it are gifts of the sovereign merciful God does not hesitate to say that faith, hope and love are essential requirements of man in his freedom. Niebuhr is quite explicit in saying this. Faith and hope are both "basic requirements of freedom." The knowledge of God which they make available to man is "not a supernatural grace which is a 'further gift' beyond man's essential nature. It is the requirement of his nature as free spirit." Love is also a requirement

"of this same freedom". Niebuhr takes some pains to distinguish faith, hope and love as he understands them from the theological virtues of Catholicism. "These ultimate requirements of the Christian ethic are therefore not counsels of perfection or theological virtues of the sort which merely completes an otherwise incomplete natural goodness or virtue. Nor can they be subtracted from man without making his freedom a source of sinful infection. They are indeed counsels of perfection in the sense that sinful man lacks them and is incapable of achieving them. But they are basic and not supplementary requirements of his freedom." [1]

It is then the very nature of man as free spirit which demands he obtain communion and intimate contact with God. But only by means of the "theological virtues" can man achieve this relationship with God. Only faith hope and love can relate man's transcendent freedom to God as source end and norm of that freedom. Lacking this relationship man's transcendent freedom can only result in a sinful exaltation of the individual or collective self into the place of God which means the very destruction of this freedom.

Faith hope and charity are basic requirements of man's freedom. But when Niebuhr describes the process of justification and the new life which the justified sinner enjoys, then these same virtues are gifts of an all merciful God.

Niebuhr never adverts to the apparent contradiction of such a position. His very silence might make one pause. But then Niebuhr is never greatly concerned to avoid paradox, antinomies, real or apparent contradiction.

The obvious difficulty with Niebuhr's position is revealed when one asks how can faith, hope and love be both grace and requirement. If man's freedom requires that he possess these virtues, if without them he can establish no relationship to God, if without them his freedom can only lead to sinful perversion, then how do these theological virtues differ from other realities which man must have to be man (a human body, a capacity for reason) and which are clearly requirements of human nature

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[1] HN, pp. 288-289.

and which no one would consider gifts. But the whole meaning of grace is of something which is not a requirement, something to which man has (neque constitutive nec exegitive) no claim. Yet Niebuhr affirms that faith, hope and love are both grace and requirement.

One might try to escape the difficulty by saying that Niebuhr does not talk about man or human nature in the abstract but of existential, sinful man. Now man as he exists has but *one* destiny: the immediate vision of the Triune God; in order to attain this destiny, man as he exists (not man as man) must have these virtues of faith, hope and love, not simply to be man but to reach the only goal God has appointed for him. In this way one could escape the difficulty. Niebuhr simply means that given man's transcendent destiny, the theological virtues are a requirement or necessity. But this will not work because Niebuhr is talking not of existential man but of man's *essential nature* (man apart from existence and history) when he speaks of the theological virtues as basic requirement for man. Moreover, although Niebuhr's magnum opus is entitled "the Nature and Destiny of man" there is no reference in any definite way to what that destiny is nor is there any effort to state whether or how this destiny transcends man's nature.

There is a much more serious difficulty here than that involved in reconciling grace and requirement. There are very awkward consequences which follow from Niebuhr's assertion that faith, hope and love are requirements of man in his freedom. For how can God in his wisdom and providence, who provides other creatures with the means they need to develop their natural capacities and powers, be so remiss in regard to man's freedom, that he allows man to exist without the means to develop his freedom?

From another point of view another awkward conclusion follows. Man as he comes from the hand of God lacks these virtues of faith, hope and love although his freedom requires them. Without them man's freedom becomes inevitably sinful. Now Niebuhr believes in neither Original Justice nor the Fall as historical states. Hence existential man was never given these theological virtues as part of his original creation nor has man ever forfeited these gifts by any act of rebellion. Why then

does man always and everywhere come into existence without them? Is not God responsible? And if God then judges and condemns man for the sin that must issue from a freedom so defective as his, how does God remain just in any way man can grasp? And American philosopher has seen this difficulty in Niebuhr's position:

"The solution for our finite predicament can be nothing less than a transcendent grace by which man, though rightly subject to eternal wrath is forgiven for being what he can not help but be, and for doing what, in the conditions in which he must act, it would be wrong of him to refuse to do." [2]

Catholic theologians avoid Niebuhr's difficulty by insisting that while historical man has but *one* final destiny which is the absolute fulfilment of man's nature and yet is supernatural and completely gratuitous because man's nature does not require this destiny, human nature has meaning without this destiny and it is conceivable (as Humani Generis says) that God could create creatures endowed with intellect without directing them to the beatific vision as their final destiny. Thus Catholic theologians protect the absolute gratuity of glory and the gifts of grace. This Niebuhr fails to do.

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[2] A. Murphy, Book Review of Niebuhr's "The Nature and Destiny of man", Journal of Philosophy, XL, p. 464.

## ANTINOMY IV

The doctrine of sin is the most developed area of Niebuhr's thought. As we have already noted above many commentators on his thought have taken notice of this. Many have called attention to the profundity of his doctrine of sin. If a doctrine is profound because it bristles with logical difficulties, then one must readly concede the profundity of Niebuhr's treatment of sin.

Niebuhr is seeking to explain how it can be that sin is universal and yet it is not by a necessity of nature but in freedom that man sins since man does feel responsible for his sin and this demands freedom as a pre-supposition. Since he has already jettisoned the doctrine of Original Sin as involving an historical fall and a transmission of sin and guilt to all men, his task is not an easy one. Niebuhr simply comes to the conclusion tha the demands of moral experience justify the violation of logic. And so his formula, sin is inevitable, man is free and responsible, is logical nonsense but it alone can account for the fact that all men are sinners and so sin is inevitable (read necessary) yet man in his own immediate experience knows he is responsible for his sin and thus he must be free.

In seeking to find evidence in tradition to support his paradoxical formula, Niebuhr does something which can only irritate traditional theologians and cause confusion to orthodox Christians. Traditional doctrine (Catholic or Protestan) always has viewed sin as an analogous concept and has always believed that one can only by analogy refer to Adam's rebellion against God and the personal disobedience of his descendents by using the same word sin. For Original Sin and Actual Sin are simply different and only under a certain aspect are they similar. Both St. Paul and St. Augustine saw the distinction between two kinds of sin. And so Niebuhr causes only confusion and irritation when he takes a statement from St. Paul referring to actual sin

and another pertaining to Original Sin and uses them both to bolster his theory that personal actual sin is universal, yet man is responsible.

Observe Niebuhr in action: [1] To stress the fact that man is responsible for his sin, he quotes Romans I, 20-21: "So that they are without excuse; because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God." (Here Paul is clearly talking about the *personal sins* of the pagans who, refusing to acknowledge God, were without excuse because the external world renders so many testimonies to God).

To underscore the fact that sin is an inevitable defect he quotes Romans 5, 12: Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Here St. Paul as all commentators would agree, speaks of Original Sin as is clear from the entire context of chapter 5.)

Niebuhr performs the same slight of hand with Augustine. He takes a quote in which Augustine is talking of Original Sin which human nature (in its head) freely committed as now inevitably affecting all who share in human nature. Niebuhr uses this quote to shore up his own paradoxical statement about personal actual sin: sin is inevitable, yet man is responsible.

Niebuhr only creates confusion by taking quotations where Paul and Augustine are not speaking of the *same* sin and using, them to support his own theory.

When Niebuhr begins to discuss his own formula it is clear that he wishes to distinguish his own idea of what constitutes sin from that of the majority of other theologians. But he is certainly less than fair to those who disagree with his ideas. Niebuhr refers to those who disagree with his ideas as Pelagian. These theologians (according to Niebuhr) are those who so insist on knowledge and freedom as pre-requisites for sin that they refuse to see any bias in man's will toward sin but place man on some great height of moral indifference and maintain that only out of sheer perverse choice of evil does man sin. Here Niebuhr has constructed a straw man. No one maintains

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[1] HN, pp. 256-258.

that sin is simply a conscious choice of evil in defiance of a known good. All (Catholic theologians at least) admit that the reliquiae peccati involve a dynamic element and inclines man to sin. According to Trent one of the effects of Original Sin was that it left the human will "inclinatum et attenuatum." All admit moreover that in any concrete case there are a whole series of actual circumstances which may diminish or remove responsibility.

Niebuhr is faced with a serious difficulty when he does away with the Fall as an actual historical event with historical consequences. In Niebuhr's account man must simply accept the fact that while creation is the work of God and thus exceedingly good, man himself has from the first moment of his existence a bias toward sin which consist of a defect in his will and which *inevitably* leads man to rebellion against God.

Niebuhr simply offers no explanation for the origin of evil and he comes perilously close to making God responsible for man's predicament. It is no help to say that this bias or defect is in the will and since the will by definition means freedom, therefore this bias or defect is a result of freedom. Nor does Niebuhr do anymore than compound confusion when he says that there is more responsibility in the bias for sin and less freedom in the actual sin than simple moralists can comprehend. Both the simple and profound will protest that the bias Niebuhr describes is neither free nor sinful.

## ANTINOMY V

One of Niebuhr's most famous paradoxes deals with agape. He refers to it as an "impossible possibility."[1] When we consider the meaning he gives to agape and the obstacles to its realization which he finds in man, we are able to understand why agape is an impossible possibility.

Agape is an utterly disinterested, completely selfless, suffering and sacrificial love of God and of the neighbour. This is the love which Jesus reveals in the awful moments of his suffering and death. This is the highest form of human love conceivable and it is thus the perfect symbol of divine love and the norm to which human actions should conform.

But moral experience reveals that men's actions never reach this level of self-sacrificing love. This is simply because man's situation at the juncture of matter and spirit will inevitably produce a self concern and self love which will corrupt or diminish man's noblest acts of virtue. Not even the grace of God can heal this wound of human nature entirely and so a consistent life of agape remains beyond the capacity of the justified sinner. Clearly agape is man's norm and yet it is impossible to attain. Why then refer to it as a possibility at all? Niebuhr does this to underline the fact that man in his transcendence realizes agape is not an alien norm but one in harmony with the radical exigencies of man's freedom. It is an ideal possibility, not one which is historically realizable. For existential man agape remains an "impossible possibility."

In reflecting on Niebuhr's many statements regarding the meaning of agape, one is surprised by the onesidedness of his treatment of self love. He ever pairs self love with adjectives

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[1] SDH, p. 156.

such as destructive, corrosive, corruptive. There is simply no mention of an ordered healthy self-love. Niebuhr never considers the possibility of a love of self which is not identical with sinful egoism or selfishness. The words of Christ, "Love thy neighbour as thyself," are seldom cited in his writings.

Niebuhr's onesided approach to self-love has some serious consequences. While Niebuhr insists that man's finiteness is not identical with his sinfulness, yet he constantly refers to self love and self concern as sinful. He makes no place for a legitimate self concern and by this omission he comes perilously close to identifying the basic drive of self preservation (which is both the source of legitimate and of sinful anxiety, self concern, self love) with sin. Not only does Niebuhr fail to grant legitimate manifestations of the basic drive of self preservation but in treating of anxiety and self concern he seems unable to grasp the fact that much of this anxiety and self concern is simply pre-moral.

Moreover Niebuhr not only fails to hold legitimate and disordered self love in tension but he refuses to concede any validity to the Catholic concept or distinction between mortal and venial sins. Lacking this distinction every manifestation of a disordered, illegitimate self love is *seriously* sinful. If this were true it is difficult to see how one could exhort the Christian to ever higher levels of moral virtue. Since all virtue (as Niebuhr expressly says) is ambiguous, what motivation does a man have for serious moral effort. It seems far more likely that man, in this Sisyphus-like situation of ever desiring to love and serve God and yet finding himself in constant contradiction to the sovereign will of God, will grow impossibly complacent or will yield to despair.

But the most serious objection to Niebuhr's treatment of Christian love is his failure to emphasize the fact that agape is not the result of human striving but is God's gracious gift to man. "The love of God is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us." (Romans: 5,5). We can love God more thant ourselves and our neighbour as ourselves because we have been so enriched and so ennobled through our sharing in the very love which constitutes the life of the Trinity itself.

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## KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

*Books by Niebuhr*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| BT | — | Beyond Tragedy. |
| CPP | — | Christianity and Power Politics. |
| CRPP | — | Christian Realism and Political Problems. |
| FH | — | Faith and History. |
| HD | — | Human Destiny. |
| HN | — | Human Nature. |
| PSA | — | Pious and Secular America. |
| SDH | — | The Self and the Dramas of History. |

*Other Sources*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| CT | — | Acts of the Council of Trent. |
| D.T.C. | — | Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique. |
| ETL | — | Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis. |
| Greg. | — | Gregorianum. |
| Th | — | The Thomist |
| TS | — | Theological Studies |
| ZkTh | — | Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie. |

## CURRICULUM VITAE OF THE AUTHOR

*John Leo Flynn was born on November 14, 1929 in Spokane, Washington, U.S.A. His early education was in Catholic schools in Spokane and in Dickinson, North Dakota. His high school education was completed in Anaconda, Montana where he graduated from Central High School in 1947.*

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